

▶ From the Downside to the Upside *By Scott Halford*

There is a natural tendency for human beings to dwell on and believe the negative. Sigal Barsade's 2001 Yale University School of Management study proved, among other things, that we tend to believe negative emotions more readily than positive ones. It was also discovered that negative emotions are more "contagious" in a group setting than positive emotions.

These findings pose an issue in any workplace that strives to boost morale and nurture a spirit of cooperation.

Negative emotional contagion shows up at work around the coffee pot and in the lunch room in the form of rumors and gossip. It also appears in meetings.

A good deal of skill is required for a meeting leader to transform a gripe session into a focused discussion about what can be done. Without an understanding of what is happening from a human interaction standpoint, it is difficult to move a meeting to a place of cooperation and good problem solving. Issues consequently go unresolved and little is accom-



plished. The inevitable frustration and negative feelings that result can become contagious and permeate the entire organization.

Add to this another finding about human behavior. Prominent Psychopathologist, Dr. Bluma Zeigarnic is famous for an effect named after her – the *Zeigarnic Effect*. She discovered that we come into a full state of consciousness and alertness through negative events. What that means is that our brains are more "greased," or alert, when we are muddling in the negative and our ability to be critical is sharpened. Negative events turn on the adrenal glands that prepare us for the survival responses of fight or flight. In contentious meetings participant response to negative or unpleasant interactions is to either want to fight or get as far away as possible. Suffice it to say, our brains are more switched on during "battle" than when things are going about in a non-contentious manner. *(continued on p. 2)*

In this issue . . .

What's New at QPC

Practical Team Activities: Win or Lose?

From the Bookshelf: Death By Meeting

H.E.A.R.T Wins!

Try a Monkey Fist

Team Litmus Test

Take this quick quiz to rate your team's work using this scale: Not True (1); True (2); Very True (3)

1. The team prepares and follows an agenda.
2. On the agenda, there are multiple people scheduled to "lead" different sections of the meeting.
3. The team meets as scheduled.
4. A casual observer cannot tell who the formal team leader is.
5. The team continues to meet even if the team leader is unavailable, sick, or on vacation.
6. The team engages in "robust" dialogue – candid conversations that explore ideas, opinions, problems and feelings.
7. Before a major decision is made, the team polls each person to build a consensus.
8. At the end of each meeting, team members agree on "next steps" or an "action plan" with specific tasks to be completed within a specific timeframe.
9. Various team members volunteer to complete the action items.
10. Team members provide substantive feedback to each other.

Total your score and turn to page three for your results.

▶ Chart Your Team's Progress *By Kristin Arnold*

Every team needs a visual scoreboard that tracks how well they are doing. Using the team's mission statement, the team should have a few metrics that indicate team success and progress. Just like the gauges on your car tell you critical information, your team's dashboard lets the team know how they are doing.

Trend Chart. The most common gauge teams use is the trend chart where the horizontal axis is a unit of time (hour, day, week, month, quarter or year). The vertical axis is some unit of productivity or costs. Make sure the team includes a vertical line indicating the team's "goal." As the team tracks progress over time, connect the dots to see the trend going up or down. See how far (or close) you are to the goal!

If you know the industry standard or "benchmark," (usually obtained by your industry trade association), you can include a vertical line indicating how well you are doing with respect to your competitors.

Thermometer. Another common gauge is the thermometer. Popular with fund-raising drives, the thermometer shows a quantity in comparison to the total goal.

Downside to Upside (continued from page 1)

What do we do? These pieces of research offer important insight into the best ways to run meetings – and to run corporations. We can either carry on business as usual or learn from these valuable findings and benefit from “going with the flow” of human nature.

Here is something that you can try the next time you run a meeting that has the potential for disagreement and nay-saying. First, remember that negative emotions are very contagious, and that it is through negative events that we become most alert.

Your “negative people” have a tendency to pick at and discount almost anything. They see it as their job to protect the organization from disasters that might unfold if they do not speak up. They can become either your worst enemy or your best ally.

When you open the meeting, announce the idea or issue you’re trying to solve. Explain to the group that you want to shoot as many holes in the idea as possible. Allow 15-25 minutes to discuss all of the reasons why the idea will absolutely **not work** and the obstacles in the way of success. Keep the input on a flipchart. After the *negative* part of the meeting, observe that you have collectively determined all the ways the idea will not work.

Next invite them to find ways to make the idea successful. Keep these “can-do” ideas on a flipchart. Make sure that the critical-minded people provide input because people have a way of believing their own data. When they hear themselves talk about approaches to make the idea happen, you’ll have easier buy-in.

By using the Zeigarnic Effect you’ve caused alertness to rise and set the idea wheels in motion by encouraging the group to do what it will naturally do – look for the negative. The objections and obstacles are now out on the table rather than festering and growing and becoming lethal in a participant’s mind. You’ve contained the negative so that it doesn’t become contagious. Most importantly, you’ve turned the meeting around to focus on the positive. Participants leave feeling as if they’ve been heard, with a sense of accomplishment and in an up mood.

Negative emotions and looking for the downside are a fact of life and a strong and natural tendency, especially in groups. When you understand and apply the research around emotional contagion and the Zeigarnic Effect you’re working with the flow instead of against it. If you try this technique, please share with us your feedback and successes on turning the downside into the upside.

Scott Halford is an accredited and certified Emotional Intelligence Provider and all-around great guy who is really smart. This article is reprinted with permission.

© 2004 Complete Intelligence, LLC . All Rights Reserved.

www.completeintelligence.com

Winter 2005
Vol. 10 No. 2

A newsletter designed to facilitate discussion and share tips and techniques to help your teams to be extraordinary.

Kristin J. Arnold, Editor
CMC, CPF, CSP

Quality Process Consultants, Inc.
11304 Megan Drive
Fairfax, Virginia 22030-5510
Phone (800)589-4733
(703)278-0892
Fax (703)278-0891
e-mail: karnold@qpcteam.com
http://www.qpcteam.com

The Extraordinary Team is a quarterly publication distributed to clients, friends and partners of Quality Process Consultants, Inc. Articles are welcome and encouraged. We sincerely would like to know what you are doing.

Quality Process Consultants, Inc. helps your teams to be extraordinary.

Team Facilitation
Team Training
Seminars & Keynotes
Team Implementation
Coaching & Consulting
Unique Team Products



Team Dashboard (continued from page 1)

Idiot Lights. When displaying a category of information (e.g. good, average bad), a simple status light might be helpful. (In my family, they are called “idiot lights” because you should check the engine when the “check engine light” comes on!). Green, Yellow and Red are universal colors that symbolize go, proceed with caution and stop!

Digital or Analog? The key to updating the dashboard is to make the process easy so it gets updated regularly. Some organizations have system applications that compile and post the data to an intranet site. More often than not, someone has to physically collect the data and post it for all to see. Make sure there is clear accountability for who will post the numbers and how often. Keep in mind, people do take vacations, so have a trustworthy backup to post the numbers for all to see team progress.

©2005 Quality Process Consultants, Inc. All rights reserved.

Duplication and reprints are okay, as long as you credit the source. Thanks!

Printed on recycled paper.



What's New at QPC Inc.

As I write this, I am gazing out my window looking at three inches of snow. I would much rather be somewhere warmer, say in Cancun in January (attending the National Speakers Association conference) or in Florida (working with two new clients, Pyramid Mouldings and International Facility Management Association) or in Singapore (presenting at the International Federation of Professional Speakers in March) or in Los Angeles (visiting my 99 year-old Grandmother in February)!

Not to worry, there are plenty of opportunities to work close to home. I am honored to be working with some new clients: BGE Home, Lockheed Martin, Council for Advancement and Support of Education (CASE), ISA: The Association of Learning Providers as well as continuing to work with existing clients.

Interestingly enough, over the past year, I have been asked by several organizations to be the closing speaker at their conferences or conventions. I developed an "endnote" that summarizes the learnings from the event and challenges the participants to develop an action plan while reinforcing teamwork to get things done. It's an excellent program (if I do so myself) as it combines my talents in facilitating, speaking, training and consulting on high performance teams. Please keep me in mind if your organization or professional association is looking for an engaging way to end their event!

On a more philosophical note, I just started a major research project based on the assessment we use in the **Executive Team Advantage** program. We are interviewing selected senior executives about their team triumphs and challenges with their direct reports. We aim to publish the findings in a "white paper" by the end of the year. We are very excited about this project and have some interest (and support) from other organizations and publications. More later!

Otherwise, enjoy the winter, wherever you are, and keep in touch! We always enjoy hearing about your Extraordinary Team!
Kristin

Practical Team Activities: Win or Lose?

Win or Lose?

To provide a structured opportunity for groups to experience competition and opportunities for cooperation between functional organizations

Time: 15 to 20 minutes

Nr. of Participants: 4 groups of equal size

Materials:

- ◆ Prepared chart of payoff schedule
- ◆ Prepared chart of a table of each division across the top
- ◆ Marking pen

Create four teams of relatively equal size and name them for functional divisions within an organization (e.g., Human Resources, Sales, Marketing, Production).

Instruct the teams that they are divisions within an organization and that their goal is to make money by voting for the organization. Money is made or lost as they vote either "Green" or "Blue" and by their voting pattern in accordance with the following payoff schedule:

4 Green	Lose \$100 each
3 Green	Win \$100 each
2 Green	Win \$200 each
1 Green	Win \$300 each
4 Blue	Win \$100 each
3 Blue	Lose \$100 each
2 Blue	Lose \$200 each
1 Blue	Lose \$300 each

For example, Sales votes "Blue" and the other three divisions vote "Green." Sales would lose \$300, and the other three divisions would win \$100. Display the totals on a tally sheet.

Do not elaborate further on these instructions. Repeat them as necessary. At the close of each round, tally each division's dollar balance.

Play five rounds according to the following instructions:

Round One – No additional instructions given. Discussions within the group, but not between groups.

Round Two – Same as round one (it takes two basic rounds before they really start to catch on to the game).

Round Three – Each group selects a delegate, and the delegates circulates from group to group, lobbying for the groups to vote a particular way; delegates return to their groups and the vote is taken.

Round Four – Delegates meet together privately and then return to their groups and the vote is taken.

Round Five – Same as rounds one and two; no discussion between groups.

After all five rounds, tally the total amounts earned by each division and then the company's net worth.

After computing the totals, debrief the activity:

Is the division amounts and company's net worth positive or negative?

Who won? Who lost?

What factors contributed to a sense of competition between the groups?

What factors fostered cooperation between the groups?

What factors mask the fact that the company's overall goal is to make money?

"Many students in our programs face hardships, but H.E.A.R.T works to give these students a sense of pride about themselves and their school. It's a process that seems to be working for them—and is therapeutic for us. We have learned that together, we achieve more."

Sylvio Lynch

H.E.A.R.T. team member

From the Bookshelf



Ever wonder why you can be intrigued with a 90 minute movie with little relevance to your daily life and yet completely bored to death by a workplace meeting? Patrick Lencioni's latest book, *Death By Meeting*, is an engaging leadership fable that defines what makes meetings engaging (ISBN 0-7879-6805-6). Comparing a movie to meeting, he insists the top two reasons meetings are not productive is the lack of drama and lack of contextual structure.

While a tad less insightful as his previous books (*The Five Dysfunctions of a Team*, *The Five Temptations of a CEO* and *The Four Obsessions of an Extraordinary Executive*), Lencioni continues to deliver a good, quick read with practical information that any leader can use. His discussion of the four different types of meetings is worth the price of the book alone. So what are you waiting for? Another dull meeting?

H.E.A.R.T Wins!

Henrico Educational Alternative Review Team (HEART) is the winner of this year's Extraordinary Work Team Day, celebrating those teams that consistently work extraordinarily well together to produce significant results.

Sometimes necessity prompts action. Many of the alternative education coordinators noticed they were spending valuable time on the phone with each other discussing applications from the same students.

Without a mandate from management or a budget, a team evolved with a core group of teachers, principals and coordinators to meet once a week to discuss challenging issues as well as monthly educational outreach sessions.

"The result is that our students benefit from understanding all the options available to them, and that the school system isn't trying to jam a specific recommendation down their throats," says Sylvio Lynch, Youth Coordinator.

Congratulations to H.E.A.R.T — an Extraordinary Team!

Try a Monkey Fist *By Jim Ball*

Years ago, before ocean liners had side thrusters, the big ships were winched to the dock using large cables of intertwined smaller ropes. The problem, however, was that these rope-cables were too heavy to throw up to the ship from the dock.

Someone created a monkey fist to solve the problem. The monkey fist is a knotted ball of rope on the end of a thick line of rope. A dockworker twirled the monkey fist on the end of the rope and flung it into the air and onto the deck of the ship. The thin line of rope connected to a larger line of rope and the larger line of rope connected to the big cable of rope. Once the monkey fist landed on the deck, the crew pulled up the thin line of rope, then the larger line of rope, and then the cable. Finally, they fastened the cable to the engine-driven pulleys on the mechanical winch.

What the monkey fist did was start the whole process. It represented a small first step that was easy to do. Once the dockworker took the small first step with the monkey fist, it paved the way for a bigger step.

The next time you have a big task to perform, perhaps one that is beyond your resolve, ask what kind of monkey fist you can use to throw a small line over the bow to get things

started. Here are several examples to give you something to think about:

Leadership. What small step can you take to move a big and important initiative forward in your company or division? Can you schedule a planning or status meeting? Can you ask for written ideas and suggestions? Can you summarize the challenges and opportunities into a white paper?

Sales. What small step can you take to inch your customer closer to a sale? Can you schedule an appointment? Can you send them a sample? Can you provide them a copy of a reference letter from a satisfied customer?

Personal. What small step can you take to reinforce or acquire a positive habit such as exercising three times a week? Can you enter the dates and times onto your calendar? Can you put your workout clothes in the car so they are ready to go? Can you call a friend and get them to commit to exercise with you?

As the Chinese expression says so well, "The journey of a thousand miles begins with a single step."

Sometimes you can create a monkey fist to help you take that first step.

Reprinted with permission. ©2004

The Goals Institute www.goalpower.com

