

Tips and techniques to improve the way your teams work

Exercising Fat & Skinny Words *By Kristin Arnold*

Is your team using skinny words when they're hungry for fat ones? Or fat words when they want to be skinny? Dr. David Palmer, a Silicon Valley negotiations expert, describes various "levels of abstraction." Unless you match your message to the expectations of your team, or talk at the same level at which they are listening, you won't connect as well as you would like to.

Patricia Fripp, national speaker and executive speech coach, describes the fat/skinny phenomenon this way: "Suppose you write the word 'automobile' on a pad. A simple concept.

Going up to the next level of abstraction, you could write above it that the car is a 'wheeled passenger vehicle,' then 'surface transportation,' then 'major force in the world's economy.' This is making the word 'automobile' fatter and fatter, larger and larger. These big ideas and abstractions are 'fat' words. They are great for con-

veying the big picture, inspiring ideas, motivating."

"Now, let's make the word skinnier. Underneath the word 'automobile,' you might write 'sedan,' 'Ford sedan,' 'red four-door Ford sedan.' Eventually, you would be talking about a specific car. These are 'skinny' words. They are essential for conveying instructions and solving technical problems. No one

holding a screwdriver, camera, or have a blank screen on their computer wants 'fat' words. You'll just frustrate them; maybe make them furious. They want to know minute details and specific who, what, when

FAT

Surface Transportation
Wheeled Passenger Vehicle
Automobile
Sedan
Ford Sedan
Red, Four Door Sedan

skinny and how."

Are your words too fat? Too skinny? Let's say your team successfully briefed the team sponsor on its recommendations – using "fat" words. Your team presents these same recommendations to middle management – using "skinnier" words and phrases. To implement your approved recommendations, the words need to *(continued on page 2)*

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Marks of Distinction

There are three marks common to all companies [and teams] who achieve distinction:

Engaged People. It isn't enough to be passionate. Passion with appropriate focus is fanaticism. Engaged people are involved with their work and compelled to do what they do with panache. The challenge is to get people as engaged about their work as they are about their outside interests and hobbies. Engaged people work smarter, serve better, and come up with new ideas.

Perpetual Innovation. This includes both incremental and revolutionary improvements. The status quo is a myth. You're either getting better or you're getting worse. I first heard Woody Hayes, late coach of The Ohio State Buckeyes say those words over 20 years ago and they are truer today than ever. Innovation must be applied to everything: operations, products and even how we think and lead. *(continued on page 2)*

Pot Luck As A Team Building Event *By Kristin Arnold*

This past February, "Resentful in New York City" complained to Dear Abby about her new boss, "a nervy man who...schedules office potlucks on company time and orders his employees to bring homemade dishes as a 'team-building' exercise."

Potlucks have been a teambuilding mainstay for decades. A simple activity to orchestrate, potlucks are an occasion to bring food and people together in an informal atmosphere, usually around lunchtime. Potlucks are especially popular in office settings (but any work environment will do), when you want to bring together the team, even if they work on different shifts or schedules.

Most potlucks are usually organized by team members rather than the team leader. When decreed mandatory, Dear Abby suggested confronting "your boss as a group and tell him how much his demands are resented by all of you." While I agree there is safety in numbers, this could be tantamount to team suicide and not particularly practical advice.

Rather than a frontal assault, I suggest an indirect approach. Many teams use Dear Abby columns (and articles like this one)

“Ralph frequently reminds us that each dish MUST be homemade...I e-mailed by boss asking if I could bring a high-quality store-bought item, because between working full time and my long commute, spending time in the kitchen isn’t something I care to do. Ralph never bothered to answer. With great resentment, I ended up making a large tuna casserole at midnight for the potluck the next day.”
Resentful in New York City to Dear Abby

Words *(cont'd from p. 1)*

get “skinny” by outlining who, how, where and what they need to do.

Many of my clients hire me to coach their teams, especially around communication issues. After giving them the automobile illustration, they learn to be more effective by evaluating each other by saying, “your words are too fat” or “those words aren’t skinny enough.” For example, during brainstorming, most ideas start out being “fat.” During the analysis and solution phases, words get “skinnier.” Implementation requires very skinny words. What words do you use with your team?

“D” Marks *(cont'd from p. 1)*

Strategic Execution. You can write a million lines of computer code, but until you add the four characters “.exe”, the code is worthless. Business dominance isn’t about how much you know. It’s a matter of IQ. That doesn’t stand for “intelligence quotient” but rather implementation quotient, and that is the difference between common knowledge and consistent application.

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

Spring 2003
Vol. 8 No. 3

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as a warm up activity: share and discuss the column for a few moments before launching into team business. I suggest sharing these general guidelines for office potluck lunches:

Pick a Day. Don’t wait until the last minute. Schedule the pot luck at least three days in advance, a full week before is even better!

Have a Theme. What would otherwise be chaos becomes organized around themes. For example, a St. Patrick’s Day potluck is more fun than a boring, regularly scheduled potluck. People will hook into something fun, unique and creative.

Strike a Balance. Resentful’s boss posted a sign-up sheet in the lunchroom that dictated food categories and limits. While sign-up sheets are helpful (especially if everyone typically brings potato chips), balance the need for structure with others’ need for spontaneity. Many teams post a sign up sheet with categories and people adjust their contributions by noting what “holes” in the menu need to be filled. Regardless, do what works for your particular culture, ensuring that people enjoy the process rather than resenting it.

Dish It Out. Let people bring what they want to bring, preferably homemade. Here’s the opportunity to try out that new recipe or bring in your favorite dish. Let people be creative and don’t slam them for trying something new! (By the way, have you ever noticed that most people eat their own food at potlucks?)

Be Gracious. Recognize that not everyone can cook or have the time to bring a homemade casserole. Prepared foods are fine as long as they don’t bring in the same thing time after time and/or bring in gacky chow you wouldn’t even feed to your dog. Then again, we all know some people who are simply food-impaired; let them bring the paper products or soft drinks.

Drift Away. Allow team members to participate within a window of time, usually an hour or so. This allows people to drift in and out, depending on their schedules for the day. No need to stay the entire time, but feel free to come back to help clean up!

Enlist Others. Success is directly proportional to the number of people involved and energized in creating a festive event. From picking the date, theme and dishes, make it a team effort and let others coordinate the activity as much as possible.

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.

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In Memoriam

Many of you know that my oldest brother Mark, passed away quite unexpectedly on March 9, 2003 in Novato, CA. Only 48 years old and in excellent health, he had a fluke heart rupture. He was in a coma and on life support for a week before his heart finally gave up. He is survived by his wife, Jay.

Although Mark was six years older than me and lived on the other side of the country, I feel blessed that we had an amiable, family friendship. As adults, we appreciated the time we had together during holidays and cruise vacations. I will always cherish our recent "Disneyland Day" where Mark, Joy (my sister), Travis and Marina (my two children) and I spent a wonderful day together, just a month before his death.

From his passing, I have learned many things and I wish to share two of these with you: First, enjoy each day; it may be your last. Trite, but true. No one saw this heart attack coming, nor will you be able to foresee the fatal car accident or deadly terrorist attack. Simply enjoy each day, the people you are with and the great work that you do.

The practical side of me exhorts you to get your paperwork in order. No one really expects death to come knocking, but when it does, do you have a living will? A last will and testament? Adequate insurance coverage? Enough cash to get through probate? Make the investment to get your financial affairs in order. It's peace of mind, really.

I thank all of you for the gracious outpouring of sympathy and concern.

Kristin



**Mark Vincent Anderson
 1954-2003**

Practical Team Activities: You're the Expert! *By Kristin Arnold*

Introduce this activity as a way to demonstrate the power of team work.

Before you get started, make sure the object is not accessible to the team members (e.g., ask everyone to hide the cellular phones).

Ask if there is anyone in the room who uses the object (e.g. a telephone). Ask them if they would consider themselves to be a frequent user, or "expert" on using a specific object (such as a telephone).



You're the Expert!

To creatively demonstrate the power of teamwork versus an individual's work

Time: 10 minutes,

Nr. of Participants: Groups of 3

Materials Required:

- a universally familiar object such as a telephone, coin, currency, company insignia etc.
- easel chart
- paper and pens

Draw the outline of the object (e.g., twelve "buttons") on an easel chart in front of the room. Ask each person to individually fill in the object (e.g., numbers and the letters on the telephone keypad).

After a few minutes, ask the team to break into groups of three to make a group agreement on the specifics of the object (e.g., numbers and letters on the telephone keypad).

While the groups are contemplating the answer, fill in the object (e.g., numbers and letters) on the easel chart, out of sight of the groups.

After the groups are done, expose the easel chart to the team.

After all have seen the "answer" and compared their work to the "answer," debrief the activity:

Which did better? The individual or group? (Most of the time, the group has a better answer. Every once in a while, an individual has a better answer – this is called "process loss" where those great ideas were not integrated to the larger team).

How did the team come up with a better answer? What process did you use?

How can we replicate this in our team?

How can we guard against process loss in our teams?

“Regardless of an organization’s size or experience, there are two key ingredients to making strategic planning work. First, a viable planning process that all managers understand and use is essential. Second, there must be organizational commitment to both the plan and the planning process.”

George L. Morrissey

The Executive Guide to Strategic Planning

From the Bookshelf



I still think one of the best books on strategic planning is *The Executive Guide to Strategic Planning* (ISBN 1-55542-032-X). Published in 1987, the book has the best description of the strategic planning process. One of the authors, George L. Morrissey, expanded the material into a three-book series entitled *Morrissey on Planning* in 1997. The first book of the series is *A Guide to Strategic Thinking: Building Your Planning Foundation* (ISBN 0-7879-0168-7), the second is *A Guide to Long-Range Planning: Creating Your Strategic Journey* (ISBN 0-7879-0169-5) and the third is *A Guide to Tactical Planning: Producing Your Short-Term Results* (ISBN 0-7879-0170-9).

In this series, George takes a potentially complex process (strategic, long range and tactical planning) and links all the planning components together. He makes clear connections between strategy, long term objectives and plans and tactical decision making. He translates planning theory into meaningful, practical principles that all can understand (even the CEO!).

As a facilitator, I really appreciate George’s explanation of how to plan. I have incorporated much of his philosophy in my practice and I am honored to recommend his books to all who are interested in successfully planning for the future.

Congratulations, Jim!

Our dear friend and advocate, Jim Blasingame was selected by *TALKERS Magazine* as a member of the Heavy Hundred, the 100 most important radio talk show hosts in America.

According to Michael Harrison, Editor and Publisher of *TALKERS Magazine*, “Each year, we identify the 100 most important radio talk show hosts in America. We’ve watched Jim Blasingame’s excellent work as the only weekday talk show in America dedicated to small business, and we are please to recognize him...Jim’s show is superb and his contribution to the marketplace is important. He is clearly one of the very best in our industry.”

As a member of Jim’s Small Business “Brain Trust” and frequent guest speaker on his syndicated radio show, I applaud his efforts and congratulate him on being one of the “Heavy Hundred!”

You can tune in to Jim’s show on radio weekdays from 6-9am Eastern and is also simulcast on the Internet at www.jbsba.com.



Are You The One?

All it takes is one to invite a group to be a team.

One person can ask for shared clarity about the collective task before members assume individual assignments.

One person can ask others “what’s in it for you to be on this team this time?”

One person can request personal promises that support performing as a team.

Are you the one?

One person can ask others what result they require.

One person can suggest prioritizing agenda items and budgeting available time.

One person can step up to a white board and record key information for the team.

All it takes is one.

One person can retain a frame of abundance over scarcity.

One person can remain unthreatened by disagreement while inviting others to remain committed through differences.

One person can see a breakthrough approaching when others see only Q-U-I-T.

Are you the one?

One person can operate from “above the line” and invite others to do the same.

One person can communicate faith in her teammates when they feel none.

One person can shine a light on opportunity for sharing responsibility.

All it takes is one.

One person can suggest five minutes of silent brainstorming on sticky notes.

One person can Call It! When another violates the team.

One person can ask “What unites us so in outcome that none can claim personal victory until it is accomplished?”

One person can. You.

*Christopher M. Avery, Ph.D. authored **Teamwork Is an Individual Skill: Getting Your Work Done When Sharing Responsibility**. You can subscribe to his free **TeamWisdom Tips** at <http://Partnerwerks.com>.*

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