

Trend Alert: Collaborative Skills *By Roger Herman*

As we rush at a rapid rate into the 21st century, we must be sensitive to the changes happening around us. There are subtle changes in the way people work together. Success in the future will depend on the development of new skills to adjust to new environments in business, government, and education.

We are moving away from the traditional relationships involving a boss who told people what to do and subordinates who almost blindly followed the directives of their superiors. The emerging model is considerably more collaborative. Workers at all levels concentrate more on cooperating with each other than on giving orders for others to do things. The hierarchy in the work organization, honored since Max Weber introduced bureaucracy, is dissolving and will all but disappear within ten years. The lines of authority will blur as people work in self-developed teams, almost oblivious to management structures.

Teamwork is prevalent in business today, but is relatively structured. Team membership is often dictated by management, practically forcing people to work together, whether they want to or not. As we move through the decade, formalized teamwork will be replaced by a new style of collaboration. In this approach, people



will work with others because they want to. Workers will form their own teams, a bottom-up approach, as opposed to the customary top-down designs. Many university students are being prepared for this emerging style through project work groups to complete class work. Some professors are wisely giving their students valuable experience in working together.

New skills will be needed for success in these changing environments. Negotiation and persuasion skills will be valuable, as will ability to coordinate, network, and connect. Most managers do not have these skills yet. Some managers will actually resist learning and using such skills, preferring to adhere to the directive model. These managers will become relics of a bygone age as the years pass.

One effective way for managers to acquire these leadership skills is by working in volunteer organizations. When people do not have to do what bosses require, the bosses will learn new ways of leading.

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Handling Interruptions *By Kristin Arnold*

Many teams suffer with constant interruptions of team "airtime." Airtime is one of the most valuable team commodities because most people are largely influenced (for better or worse) by whoever is speaking!

As a speaker, you want to be clear and concise, say what needs to be said and influence your fellow team mates. And as the listener, you should be attentive to the speaker, listen with your ears and your heart for what is said as well as what is spoken between the lines. Add several listeners into the mix, and you need to balance the conversation so all have a chance to be heard.

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Team Standard Time

When your team is scattered across different time zones, coordinating efforts can be tricky, especially when daylight savings time springs forward!

One way to keep everyone on track is to agree on a "Team Standard Time (TST)," a time zone that is centrally located to all team members. For example, if you have teams located on the East and West Coasts, select a city (e.g. Denver, even though no one on the team works in Denver!). Declare your "Team Standard Time" (TST) to be the same as Denver's time zone.

Use TST to communicate times with each other: "We'll hold a teleconference at 2:00 TST." It doesn't matter which zone you work in as long as everyone works from the same standard.

Adapted from www.millpondgroup.com

"If you interrupt, you can appear inconsiderate, abrasive, even aggressive to others."

Barbara Pachter

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

Spring 2002
Vol. 7 No. 3
\$14.99 per year

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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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Interruptions *(continued from page 1)*

With this type of open and clear communication, teams engage in a rich dialogue with meaningful outcomes. And you can't do this without respecting each others' airtime.

Interruptions signify a breach of that respect. But before you go blaming someone else, look in the mirror. When you speak, are you speaking clearly and concisely? Or do you drone on forever? Can others contribute to your ideas without interrupting you? Have you established ground rules to explicitly prevent this undesirable behavior? The problem might be with you, not with your team mate.



occur from time to time and the person who interrupted you most likely isn't even aware of his actions," explains Barbara Pachter, a business communications expert (www.pachter.com). "Responding to the interruption in a rude manner can hurt your credibility." So it's important to give feedback when you notice an interruption.

A simple reminder of the ground rule might do the trick. But if the behavior persists, you owe it to your team mate to graciously point out this behavior and how it affects you and the team's dynamic.

Finish Your Point.

Pachter also believes you should continue with what

you were saying. Stand your ground when interrupted. Hold your hand up and say, "I'd like to continue..." After a few times, the other person may get the hint!

Be Clear, but Polite. If the interrupter doesn't get the hint, Pachter suggests using firm statements such as "I'll discuss that as soon as I'm finished"; "I'll be happy to address that as soon as I finish my thought"; and "Hold that thought." Or, "Excuse me, I wasn't finished."

Use a Gatekeeper. Finally, if there are constant interruptions and side conversations, consider using a "gatekeeper," one person on the team who is responsible for assigning airtime. The gatekeeper ensures all speakers finish their thoughts, makes sure all team members have a chance to speak, and sets the order when several people want to speak at a time (often called queuing).

Interruptions are a natural part of team work. It's what you do when an interruption occurs. If you are the interrupter, say you're sorry and ward off making it a habit. If you are being interrupted, be gracious and understanding while firmly standing your ground.

Acknowledge Your Habit. Awareness is the first step toward recovery. Just being aware that you interrupt others is a huge step!

Resist the Urge. If you are tempted to interject your comments, bring a pen and paper with you so you can take notes. Rather than blurting out before it's your turn, use your notes as a reminder when it becomes your turn to speak.

Be Considerate. Ask yourself, "Have I given the other person a chance to finish speaking?" "Am I hogging all the air time?" "Is it really necessary for me to make a comment right now?"

But let's just say it is *not* you. Your team mate *is* an air-hog. Try these techniques to smother this nasty habit:

Establish Ground Rules. Suggest the team create some ground rules to clearly state the behavioral expectations of the team, such as "no interruptions," "listen intently," or "one person speaks at a time." Not only do these ground rules prevent the unwanted behavior, but when someone interrupts, you may then gently remind him of the ground rules.

Be Understanding. "Interruptions

"Jim Blasingame's unstinting support of our efforts at the SBA is only exceeded by his passion for helping entrepreneurs follow their dreams. We are fortunate to have such an advocate, and this award is a tribute to Jim's significant contribution to small business and the marketplace of ideas."

Hector Barreto, Administrator
U.S. Small Business Administration

What's New at QPC Inc.

I am so excited; Jim Blasingame has been selected by the U.S. Small Business Administration as the 2002 Small Business Journalist of the Year. Jim is the creator and host of the nationally syndicated radio/Internet talk show, *The Small Business Advocate*, publisher of the weekly ezine, *The Small Business Advocate Newsletter*, and author of *Small Business Is Like A Bunch Of Bananas*.

As part of his "Small Business Advocate Brain Trust," I have been on his radio show numerous times talking about teamwork in the small business. It's always a pleasure working with Jim, and he certainly deserves this award.

I have also had the pleasure of working with St. Catherine's Hospital, Sharon Regional Medical Center, Federal Executive Institute Alumni Association, the Maryland Pollution Prevention Partnership, Covance Inc. and Baltimore Gas and Electric. This spring, I am also completing my final two weeks of US Coast Guard Reserve duty and retiring in August. So enjoy the springtime and talk with you soon!

Kristin

#16 in Fast Company's Fast 50

Ken Miller, Director of Performance Improvement, State of Missouri was chosen as a *Fast Company* Change Agent—"an activist determined to challenge the status quo, make a positive impact and make a difference by doing things differently."

In two and a half years, Missouri's Department of Revenue (DOR) issued refunds 80% faster, cut wait times in DMV lines by 50%, and won the Missouri Quality Award.

With a shared vision to "Simplify" the agency, and some unique customer satisfaction tools, teamwork [and a little help from Kristin to train their team leaders], DOR mobilized empowered teams to radically improve our key processes (tax refunds, drivers licenses, car registrations, etc.) for the benefit of the customer. Teams spent extensive time being with, talking with and observing customers. Senior management worked a day a month in DMV offices to learn the jobs, feel the customers' experience, and pick employees' brains. Customers set performance goals. Employee suggestions jumped from an average of 12 total ideas per year to over 1200. Extensive measurement was put in place to capture the cost of the burden placed on citizens.

Being recognized by *Fast Company* magazine is quite the accomplishment! Congratulations Ken, Kay and the gang at the Department of Revenue!

www.fastcompany.com/fast50/people/change/16.html

Practical Team Activities: Odyssey of the Mind *By Kristin Arnold*

Odyssey of the Mind

To ask team members to think beyond the conventional—to think creatively!

Time: 5-20 minutes, depending on team size

Nr. of Participants: 5 to 25 people

Materials Required: Three to four various interesting household objects, such as an extension cord, unique cooking utensils, etc.

Introduce this activity as a way to challenge creativity, similar to the "Odyssey of the Mind." Ask if anyone is aware of the school program called "Odyssey of the Mind." If no one volunteers, share the origins and purpose:

Sponsored by NASA, Odyssey of the Mind is a school program designed to foster creative thinking and problem-

solving skills among students from kindergarten through college. Students solve problems with a variety of different tools. By encouraging children to solve problems in a creative and unique way, students learn lifelong skills such as working with others as a team, evaluating ideas, making decisions and creating solutions while developing self-confidence from their experiences. (For more information, check out www.odysseyofthemind.com)

Now that the team knows what Odyssey of the Mind is all about, encourage the team to think differently about the first object you have in your hand. For example, take an extension cord, and wrap it up. It could be an extension cord (traditional thinking) or it could be a

whip to beat eggs. Or it could be a lasso. Or it could be...

Tell the team to pass "whatever this is" around the room, and ask each to share what it could be. (Make it okay to pass if they don't have an idea to share quickly. Otherwise, you can get bogged down....)

Hand the cord to the next person and encourage them to think creatively. Ask, "What could this be?"

When the cord has been passed to all team members, introduce one or two other objects.

After all have had a chance to participate, debrief the activity:

- ◆ What inspired your creativity?
- ◆ What made it difficult to be creative?
- ◆ What can we do to encourage creativity on our team?

"Improvement is infinite. No matter how good we become, we can still get better. And I see that not as obligation, but opportunity."

Mark Sanborn
UPGRADE!

From the Bookshelf



Ever since reading Mark Sanborn's book "UPGRADE!: Proven Strategies for Dramatically Increasing Personal and Professional Success," I have been enamored with the word, "upgrade."

UPGRADE! What a positive word! I have used the term weakness, area for improvement, do differently etc., but what a powerful, positive way to look at buffing up your skills, attitude, behaviors and performance.

Mark does a superb job giving lots of tips and techniques to inspire you to reach new levels of success. In this book, he:

- ◆ Confirms things you already know
- ◆ Challenges you to continue doing those things you have done, but for some reason or another, you have stopped doing
- ◆ Reframes issues so you may see things from a different perspective
- ◆ Provides great insight into things you never even dreamed of!

For example, I have always considered writing a journal, log-book, diary or some way of chronicling my adventures. I never like what I write, so I stop writing.

Mark says "Many of the most successful and creative people I know keep a journal. While some may record the events of each day, the majority are jotting down their insights, reflections and information. More powerful than just keeping a journal, I've found, is periodically reviewing one's journal to reinforce the important things one has experienced and learned."

The Upgrade? I now keep a journal of *important* things that I have experienced and learned. For me, it's very focused. It's full of bullets and pictures rather than stream-of-consciousness. It's meaningful in hindsight as well as in the writing.

For more upgrades, check out Mark's website at www.MarkSanborn.com

Upgrading a Dull Process

At Microsoft, one of the dull low-level tasks involved in creating software is to do "the daily build." The person doing the daily build takes all the different "code" (written programs) from the programmers and puts it on one computer, making sure it all works together. For years this was performed by an entry-level person and regarded a grunt work.

One manager changed that and in doing so, made the process more efficient.

This manager gave the daily-build responsibilities to the people writing the code. Each day, all the programmers would give their code to one "buildmeister," who put it all together. If the code didn't work together, the person whose code was found to be the culprit then became the buildmeister as a punishment, until someone else's code screwed up the system.

In the summer of 1996, the buildmeister was also given an enormous zucchini, which soon became known as the "zucchini of questionable freshness," sometimes with a fake nose and glasses, to keep in their office until the new buildmeister was named. The benefits of this process (not the zucchini) were:

- ◆ No one wanted to be the buildmeister, so there was extra incentive to hand in quality code that didn't break the system.
- ◆ The unpleasant task was shared by everyone.
- ◆ Higher level people were doing the task. They wanted to spend as little time on it as possible, so when their turn came, they tried to think of ways to automate the task of buildmeister.

From Julie Bick's book, *All I Really Need to Know in Business I Learned at Microsoft*.

Who Packs Your Parachute?

By Dakota Livesay



Charles Plumb, a Navy pilot during the Vietnam War, who's plane was shot down, and after parachuting safely to the ground was captured and spent 6 years in a communist prison, was eating in a restaurant when a man came up to him, introduced himself and said, "Mr. Plumb, I packed your parachute. I guess it worked!"

Plumb replied, "It sure did. If you had packed it wrong I wouldn't be here today."

That night Charles Plumb thought about the sailor who, deep in the bowels of the ship carefully weaved the shrouds and folded the silks of each chute, in his hands the fate of someone who probably didn't even know he existed.

Each of us have people who fold our parachute, people who make our job successful, people who provide us with services that make our lives comfortable and safe. At the same time we pack the parachute for others. We need to thank those who pack our parachutes, and pack others' parachutes with consciousness.