



Collaborations

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*At work, do you
have the opportunity
to do what you do
best everyday?*

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Book Corner ~ *Now, Discover Your Strengths* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman

In our 4th quarter 2000 issue we enthusiastically reviewed *First, Break All the Rules* by Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman. Now, we are enthusiastic once again about the follow-on book, *Now, Discover Your Strengths*.

According to the authors, when asked, “At work, do you have the opportunity to do what you do best every day?” only 20% of respondents strongly agree. This book is about understanding what an individual’s natural talents are and then learning how to build on their strengths so that they contribute to the organization by doing what they do best.

The Gallup organization defines talent as “any recurring pattern of thought, feeling or behavior if it can be productively applied.” Skills determine if you can do something; talents reveal how well and how often you do it.

The focus of the book is on strengths as opposed to weaknesses. If we combine our talents, knowledge and skills, we can create strengths. Buckingham and Clifton tell us that “it is never possible to possess a strength without the requisite talent.” This is an interesting concept, since we often send people to training to “fix” their weaknesses!

Gallup has identified 34 talents and has developed an assessment to identify an individual’s top 5 talents. The assessment is online and requires a code number to access it. (The code number comes on the book when you buy it.)

If you are thinking about assessing skills or competencies, or if you are considering revamping your performance management system, you may want to read this first.

And, if you want to understand yourself better, you will find this book a useful tool. Even without the assessment, the book guides you toward better self understanding.



Mission Statements

Question: In the last issue of Collaborations you touched on the subject of mission statements indicating you would examine the subject in more detail later. What’s the big deal with mission statements?

Collaborations Response

In our last issue we discussed mission statements as a “mediating” influence. Let’s start at the beginning. Then we’ll come back to the idea of mediating influence.

Let’s not get tied up in semantics. When we talk about a mission statement in this article we are referring to the overarching statement of purpose, or overarching goal, for an organization or work group. Some would argue that is a vision statement. Suit yourself.

Most organizations have a mission statement, if for no other reason than it is discussed so frequently in almost all of the popular leadership and management literature. There is a

Mission Statements

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wide recognition that somehow a mission statement, a clear statement of purpose for an organization, is helpful or necessary. However, in a practical sense, in many cases that is where it seems to end.

For example, when talking with client groups about mission statements we invariably ask, "Does your organization have a mission statement?" Typically, every hand goes up. When asked the next question, however, everyone just sits there. That question is, "Who can stand up and recite the mission statement?"

So it seems that most everyone knows their organization has a mission statement, but no one knows what it says.

What does that tell us about the usefulness of a mission statement? Practically, it tells us that in some organizations, the mission statement is for the annual report and/or to look good under glass hanging on wall, but has no relative bearing on the people, their work, or the organization.

What is the real purpose of a mission statement?

We believe the purpose behind the mission statement is to orient everyone to the overriding purpose of the organization. Then, in their day-to-day efforts, in the frenzy of work activity, everyone has an underlying guidance about why they are doing what they are doing and how it contributes to or fits into the bigger picture. It provides guidance for making big decisions and often small ones too.

On a daily basis what guides people in their work?

It certainly is not the plethora of instructions and rules that organizations generate over time. Rather, it is the mental model which individuals have built up in their heads about what it means to be part of this particular organization and what this organization is attempting to achieve. The mission statement is an attempt to give clarity to that mental model, and perhaps, even more importantly, to orient everyone's mental model in the same direction.

Otherwise, you can guarantee that there will be many different mental models and ideas about what the mission of the organization is. It is very probable that people will be working at cross purposes. We believe that one of the fundamental responsibilities of leadership and management is to provide clarity about the purpose in

which people are engaged.

How long should a mission statement be?

Since we believe people should be able to easily say the mission statement, we would advocate that it be short rather than long.

How do you develop a mission statement?

One of our strongest beliefs is that "involvement is the key to commitment." In organizations what we really are interested in is commitment -- heart and soul, body and mind. Therefore, we believe a mission statement should be the result of much discussion throughout as much of the organization as possible and not just handed down from the "ivory tower."

Probably a year to develop a mission statement is much more realistic than a month, a week, or a weekend. Certainly the senior leadership team can put together a draft and float it into the organization asking for feedback and discussion from all levels. Then it can be recrafted and floated again. (With the advent of ubiquitous and easily used forms of communication such as e-mail, an ongoing discussion of the mission statement can be rather easily conducted.)

The objective is, when the mission statement is finalized, almost everyone will have had an opportunity to think about it, to touch it, to discuss and to argue about it. Involvement is the key to commitment and the mission statement is something to which we want people to be committed! When a person is part of the process, there is no need to "memorize" it -- its essence will be internalized through the process.

What should the mission statement contain?

The obvious answer of course is a clear statement of the overarching purpose, or overarching goal of the organization. A mission statement needs to be concise and very well balanced. By well balanced we mean it needs to have the broadest possible appeal.

For example, a mission statement might be crafted which would have strong appeal to the human "soft" side of the enterprise while neglecting the business "hard" side of the enterprise. That sort of mission statement while appealing strongly to those people who are more "people" oriented will fail to appeal to those who are more "business" oriented. The converse is also true. Ideally a mission statement should have a balanced appeal to both the "people" and the "business authority" structure of the organization.

*involvement is the
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A mission statement should also create an image in which people can see themselves engaged and involved. That type of mission statement will have the broadest possible appeal. The broadest possible appeal will be particularly important if the mission statement is to be a “mediating influence,” which brings us back to the beginning of this article. In addition to providing clarity of purpose, guidance in decision making, and a focal point for everyone’s efforts, a good mission statement can also be appealed to for the resolution of some of the differences that typically arise in an organization.

For example, in conflicts which polarize the business part of our efforts against the people side of our efforts, a well-crafted, balanced mission statement can be appealed to and held up as a rallying point to encourage both parties in the conflict to look for common and creative solutions which would help fulfill the mission.

Thus a good mission statement might often be useful in collapsing recurring polarization’s in organizations. In other words, as we stated in the previous issue of *Collaborations*, a mission statement ideally will be a unifying force; one which compels people to work together effectively toward the common purpose.

A mission statement that only looks good under glass or in the annual report will not serve that purpose if no one knows it or has any investment in it.

Remote Management Tips

Many of the managers we speak with have direct reports working in a different location from them. It may be a different office, a client location or at home. It may even be a different time zone or different shift. Good management requires the same things whether people are remote or not (a good relationship, clear objectives, feedback, etc.) However, when managing remotely, these basics can be a bit more challenging. Here are a few tips on managing remotely.

TIP #1: Schedule a regular time to talk (either face-to-face or on the phone.) Use these times to talk about anything on the employee’s mind. When he/she knows you are setting aside time just for them, they will likely share more.

TIP #2: Be very clear on the employee’s objectives -- both the annual objectives as well as what you expect on specific work assignments. You may want to follow up your conversation about objectives with an e-mail documenting your agreement.

TIP #3: Meet each commitment you make to the employee. If you promise to provide some information by a particular date, do it. It’s very easy to break trust by missing a commitment with any of your employees. Trust is very difficult to build when you don’t interact regularly with your employees.

TIP #4: Consider the importance of the message and then determine which communication vehicle is best before communicating with your remote employees. Consider the following pros and cons.

E-mail Pros

It’s quick.
You have documentation.

E-mail Cons

There is no opportunity for input from the employee.
Unclear writing can confuse issues.
People are inundated with e-mail and they may not see your note

Voice mail Pros

It’s quick.
They can hear the tone of your voice.

Voice mail Cons

There is no opportunity for input from the employee.
It must be short.
There is no documentation.

Voice-to-Voice Pros

They can hear the tone of your voice.
It is a two-way conversation with room for input.

Voice-to-Voice Cons

You can’t see the body language.

Face-to-Face Pros

You can have full two-way communication.

Face-to-Face Cons

It may require money to travel.

TIP #5: Bring the group together face-to-face once in a while. Then use those meetings to build relationships among your employees. If they know each other, you will find they will work more collaboratively when you need them to.



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Meeting Starter

We are often asked for ideas for getting meetings going and building relationships. This issue's meeting starter is particularly useful for a group that doesn't meet together very often.

Give everyone a piece of flip chart paper and markers.
Have each person create a flip chart illustrating Old, New, Up, Down.
They should draw pictures showing

- What's new since we were last together (new)
- What's the same (old)
- What's going on that's good (up)
- And a negative (down).

Then have everyone share. You can post the charts on the wall during your session.

We'd Like to Hear From You

Do you have a question for us or a topic you would like us to write about? We'd love to hear from you. Send an e-mail to sgerke@worldnet.att.net with your question or ideas. We can't respond to each individually, however we will respond in *Collaborations* based on topics most requested.