



Collaborations

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Book Corner ~ *The Inner Game of Work* by Timothy Gallwey

I have a new favorite book. *The Inner Game of Work* by Timothy Gallwey has captured my attention. Gallwey first wrote *The Inner Game of Tennis* and *The Inner Game of Golf*. He then got involved in the corporate world and determined that his coaching methods for tennis and golf also apply to the work setting. His principles and methods are useful for the development of excellence in individuals and teams.



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The basic premise is that **Performance = Potential - Interference**. And, we cause most of our own interference with our self talk. Gallwey provides insights on how we interfere, but also provides help with techniques for reducing interference.



The book is useful on at least two levels. As an individual, I found helpful tips for my own learning and growth. As a coach, I found some approaches and tools that I can use with my clients. So, if you are interested in helping yourself or others be more effective, pick up *The Inner Game of Work*.

Communications

Question: It seems like it is very hard work to get accurate information out to everyone. Yet rumors get around so fast it is unbelievable! Do you have any suggestions as to how we might enhance the communications process or combat the rumor mill?

Collaborations response:

Your question leads us to share a number of thoughts. First of all, it is just plain hard work making sure everyone gets the appropriate information in a timely fashion. There is no substitute for repetition and saying the same things in many different ways.

Just as many husbands are accused of “selective hearing,” many managers and employees can be justifiably accused of the same selectivity! Just as you are advised in an active listening course, we also suggest that you ask what people have heard or know about a topic of current interest. Asking shows that you are interested. It allows you to reinforce or correct the information. It gives you a sense of how much and what is being heard and how it is being heard.

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Communications

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The rumor mill

We believe the only effective way to combat the rumor mill is to flood the organization with accurate information. We would add to that the stipulation that you not engage in rumors yourself, and that you immediately correct or squelch any rumors you come across.

A recent article described a survey done by Joanne Reichardt, Vice President of Randstad North America, an Atlanta-based staffing service. She polled more than 1,100 workers and nearly 1,000 employers in the first three months of this year to determine how in sync they were with each other. Some of the gaps in the results are very interesting:

- 79% of employers think they take care of their workers, only 44% of workers agree.
- 65% of workers think they are loyal to their companies, only 41% of employers agree.
- 60% of employers say they are taking action to improve workplace morale, only 33% of workers agree.
- 87% of workers say they are happy with their immediate bosses.

Employees whose companies provide regular performance reviews and share financial information are more loyal than employees whose companies do not.

In general, Reichardt says, “Employees are very positive about their jobs. They have high morale and are willing to go out of the way to help their companies. All of this translates to higher productivity from the workers in your company.”

She goes on to say, “The good news is that the most powerful motivational tool in an employer’s tool kit is plain talk. Employees want to be told what is going on. If ever there was a magic pill to build trust in the workplace and prepare for the future it may be for companies to have open and honest communication with those they employ.”

You have undoubtedly heard the adage that knowledge and information are power. There are certainly people who believe information is a way to control people. The survey above, and many others, would suggest that open,

honest communication of information which tells employees what is going on is the best strategic and tactical option available.

However, that kind of openness and flooding the organization with information brings us to some very basic questions. “What is your basic belief, or your company’s, about trusting people with information? How much information do people need? How much do they want? How much can they be trusted with?”

Symptoms or underlying issues?

We’ve worked in companies where the “organizational culture” is not based on that kind of sharing of information. When the culture isn’t supportive and encouraging of open, honest communication then working on “communications” really is working on the symptoms and not the underlying problem.

For example, we have worked with numerous companies where an employee survey is administered on an annual or biannual basis. The survey typically has a category asking about internal communications and flow of information.

When the results on the “communications” category are low, a great deal of time and energy is poured into working on the vehicles and mechanics of communications. Then, lo and behold, the next time the survey is administered – communications is still low! The reason for that is that the work has been done on the symptoms, not the underlying problems.

If an organization’s culture doesn’t value and place importance on open, honest communications; on trust and belief in the inherent goodness of our employees; on involving employees in the appropriate processes and decision making, then communications will be a problem.

(Our use of SYMLOG has been the most effective method we have at our disposal to help organizations get at, and work on, the underlying problems so we’re not just working on symptoms.)

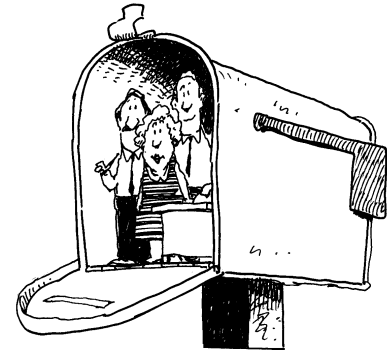
In summary, open honest communications take hard work; a culture that values sharing information; fundamental beliefs in the value and potential of people, and flooding the system with information.

Another adage you’ve probably heard is, “if you don’t value and take care of your people, someone else will!” That’s true also.

E-mail

We used to ask, “Do you have an e-mail id?” Now we ask, “What is your e-mail id?” E-mail is ubiquitous and with that has come some problems -- one of those being the volume of e-mail we receive and need to process.

In the Spring 2001 issue of *Collaborations*, we discussed “Remote Management Tips.” In that article, we listed some pros and cons of using e-mail to communicate. One of the “cons” had to do with people being inundated with too much e-mail and therefore not seeing your note. In this issue, we’d like to focus further on the challenges of e-mail and offer a couple of suggestions for more effective use.



When we are working with clients, we hear again and again how much time individuals spend each day reading and replying to e-mail. While e-mail is an incredible tool that makes communication quick and easy, it is also a drain on productivity. If used effectively, it can be the productivity enhancer we all need.

There are some keys to the effective use of e-mail. However, the effectiveness of these keys is limited if you are the only one using them. We recommend that you and the team of people you work with the most determine which keys you agree will work best for you. Then begin using them.

You may find it helpful to implement keys one at a time. While it will take longer to achieve the productivity you are looking for, it’s relatively easy for people to remember one new thing. You can give positive feedback to those who are using the key to reinforce the behavior, and remind those not using it to get started. Then, as the key is used regularly throughout the team, you can add another.

We’ll provide 2 keys this issue, and continue to add keys in each issue. If you have a key that you think works particularly well, send an e-mail to sgerke@att.net. We’ll incorporate those keys that we can.

E-mail Key #1:

Establish a set of codes to use in the subject line to help people sort what to read now vs. later.

This comes from a team Susan participated in several years ago. The team of instructors found themselves with short periods of time to respond to e-mail and this system helped them prioritize. It also helped reduce the total amount of e-mail within the group. The system we used was this:

Right after “SUBJECT” we wrote one of these 4 codes:

FYI - For Your Information only -- read when you have time

ACT - There is an ACTION item in this note (we also put the due date in the subject line)

HOT - Read this first. It’s extremely important

NRR - No Response Required -- please read now, but if your response is “no” then don’t reply - we will assume you have read this and cannot help.

(NRR was extremely useful to us as it was common for a note to be sent that asked if anyone was available to teach on a given day. With 25 people in the group, the author of the e-mail could easily get 25 e-mails back and had to read them all to determine who was available.)

This may not be the right set of codes for your group, but if you and the group discuss the groups needs, you will determine what will work best for you. It’s incredibly helpful in sorting incoming e-mail as well as reducing unneeded replies.



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E-mail Key #2

your_name_here@email.com

Write a separate e-mail for each subject. This may sound as if it does exactly the opposite of what we want because it actually generates more e-mail. What it does do, however, is make it easier for people to manage and process their e-mail.

For example: You send me an e-mail with 3 topics. I determine that I need to forward the e-mail to someone else to handle the first topic. With the 3 topics all in one note, I either need to delete the unrelated information or put a clear note on my forward as to which item needs attention.

On the second topic, I determine that I have an immediate answer and can reply right away. It is then a good idea to delete or file the note I received so I know I am done and don't have unnecessary notes in my in-box. If there are other items in the note, I can't do that. Now I will see that request several times until I have responded to all 3 topics.

I determine that I need to spend some time thinking about the answer to the 3rd topic, so I wait to reply. Once I do respond, again it would be useful to delete or file the original note and I can do that only if all 3 topics are complete.

So, in this case, I can be more productive if you send me 3 notes than if you send me one. Think about the receiver when you determine whether multiple notes would be more useful.

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@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.