Collaborations

All of us have, at one time or another… deceived ourselves into thinking that others are to blame for our situation.
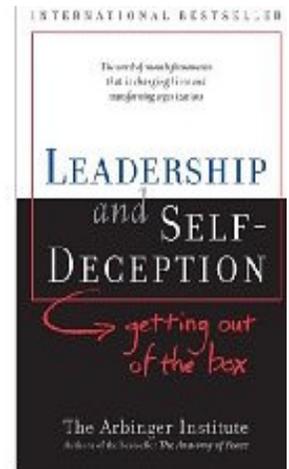
Inside this issue:

Book Corner

Leadership and Self-Deception by The Arbinger Institute

Leadership and Self-Deception is a book that draws you in. It is written as the story of a man who doesn't realize that many of the frustrations he has with other people, both at work and at home, actually are due to his self-deception.

The book will help you understand what self-deception is, how we get trapped in it, how it undermines personal achievement and organizational performance and then how to solve it.

Although "Leadership" is in the title – this is a book for everyone. All of us have, at one time or another in our lives deceived ourselves into thinking that others are to blame for our situation. This book provides a new way to think about those situations and is a must read for anyone who wants to improve themselves or their relationships.

Communications, Collaborations & Community

In our last two issues we have responded to the following question:

Question: Our organization has identified three major objectives. We call them the 3 Big Cs: "Collaboration, Communication and Community." We know that excellence in these three areas is critical to our success, both internally and externally with our clients. Our desire as an organization is to continually improve and excel: in collaborative efforts; in clear, concise and effective communication; and in building an effective and healthy community. Do you have any suggestions that might help us?

The first two articles addressed Communications and Collaboration. First, we consider these desired organizational outcomes to be cumulative in nature; i.e. good communications are fundamental; on that solid foundation productive collaborative efforts can be built; and with those two objectives in place a sense of effective community can be developed.

Second, in our opinion, we argued strongly that effective communication and effective collaboration are in large measure a matter of *choice*. Please visit our web sites to read the discussions in the last two issues in full.

We now turn our thoughts toward building an effective sense of community.

(Continued from page 1)

Community

If, as indicated in the question, "community" is a desired organizational model or outcome, the following from our dictionary will help us get started.

Collectively, we have here the sense of common: values, responsibilities, characteristics, interests, goals and attitudes - that's a recipe for an effective organization and a sense of community.

> *Community:* **1** the people of a district or country considered collectively, esp. in the context of social values and responsibilities; society; **2** [usu. with adj.] a group of people having a religion, race, profession, or other particular characteristic in common; **3** a feeling of fellowship with others, as a result of sharing common attitudes, interests, and goals

Organizations are naturals for becoming productive communities

Organizations are uniquely positioned to be able to produce and sustain a productive, effective and healthy sense of community. There are common threads that run through organizations and communities. Let's examine some in light of our definition of community above.

Example one: An organization has, or ought to be able to define, an overarching purpose. That overarching purpose is a *de facto 'characteristic'* that every member has *'in common, a shared interest.'* Furthermore, each unit of an organization has its own purpose. And each unit's purpose fits into the organization's overarching purpose. There is leverage for building a sense of collective effort - community.

It is one of the primary reasons that businesses and organizations ought to have a very clear sense of purpose that everyone knows and understands. The popular word for that is "mission."

We tend to shy away from using 'mission' because it has been over used and poorly used in the business

world. Almost without exception every organization we work with has a 'mission' statement. These statements all look good under glass. They are impressive to read. However, when we ask people to quote the organization's mission statement, all we usually get are blank, slightly embarrassed looks.

Here is a wonderful *'shared characteristic, common interest,'* a lever for building a strong sense of community that isn't being used effectively. It is much more important for people to know the purpose of your organization than for the purpose to look good under glass!

Example two: Organizations by their very nature are '*goal*' oriented. They lend themselves to *'shared common goals.'*

There is nothing like working together to achieve common goals and building an effective organization to draw people together - to produce a sense of community. How clear are your organization's goals? (We wrote extensively about goal setting in 2 issues of *Collaborations, Fall & Winter of 2004.* Those are available on our web sites.)

Example three: Most organizations operate through systems of shared *'values.'* First, organizations screen for values. A dishonest employee will probably not last long in any organization. Second, in every organization, effective teamwork and effective working relationships arise from a set of '*shared values'* around what is important when people are working together.

These systems of shared values anchor and strengthen the sense of community.

Communities don't happen by accident

By their very nature organizations are in a unique position to create and sustain a strong and rewarding sense of community. We admire your efforts to do so. We also admire your identifying good communications, and effective collaborations as the building blocks for creating an effective and healthy community.

However, that sense of community usually does not happen by accident. If you pay attention to clarity of purpose, common goals, clear responsibility, and a shared system of values you can continually strengthen the effectiveness and health of your organization - your community.

Working at Home – It's Great and It's Challenging

With the current economic challenges today, organizations are looking for ways to reduce costs. Providing employees with an opportunity to work from home is being used as one vehicle for cost reduction. Whether the savings is due to reduced floor space or other costs associated with having employees on site, it is a viable approach for many companies.

Working at home – or "telecommuting" as it is most often called, has been offered in many organizations since the mid-90's. I (Susan) started working out of my home-office in 1993 while I was still working for IBM. Some companies, however, are just embarking on this new way of work for employees.

As with most programs, there can be both positive and negative aspects of telecommuting. We'll explore both here.

The Great Aspects

Increased productivity is probably one of the biggest benefits of telecommuting. In a survey of 1300 Global Executives 2007, 78% reported that telecommuting workers were more productive than or as productive as colleagues working in the office. Contributors to that productivity include: 1) time formerly spent commuting is spent working, and 2) the quiet environment has fewer interruptions allowing focus on the work.

Flexibility is often cited by telecommuters as a key benefit of telecommuting. That flexibility can be focused on the family or on the business. For the family, working from home can allow the telecommuter to see the children off to school, attend special events and even get involved in the community – coaching or contributing in other ways. This doesn't mean they aren't working a full day. One can work 8:00 to 5:00 and still do each of these activities. Very simply, when the day ends the commute is "down the hall" or "downstairs" rather than 30 minutes to 2 hours or more on the roads.

For the business, flexibility can be very important. In our increasingly global world, telephone conference calls are very common. An employee in California can speak with colleagues in Europe very early in the California day – even before they've showered and dressed for the day. Conversations with Asia can be conducted after dinner without having to drive back to the office.

Fortunately, technology has made telecommuting easy. Colleagues, clients, and vendors, have no idea where you are when they are speaking with you or communicating with you using e-mail or other electronic tools. The focus is on work rather than location.

The Not So Great Aspects

Telecommuting can have some negative aspects to it also. Not everyone has a dedicated space in their home where they can work. This can cause many issues including the following two. 1) Interruptions from family members sharing the space can be a distraction. 2) It can be difficult to separate one's business life and personal life. For those with this issue, work can be all consuming and can cause stress and family problems.

Another common issue with telecommuting is unrealistic expectations from family members. A spouse might expect you to deal with repairmen, household chores, and child care. Children might expect you do help with homework and attend after school sporting events.

Another "not so great" aspect can be the perception of colleagues that don't telecommute. Colleagues or your boss may feel you aren't carrying your weight since they can't see you working. Or, they may not include you in important decisions or may forget to update you on information you need to be successful.

The work-at-home world is here to stay. It works great for a majority of telecommuters. If it's not working, we hope some of our suggestions will help you improve the situation.

Susan Gerke

is the president of Gerke Consulting & Development and "helps people work better, together." Susan's focus since 1989 has been in designing, customizing and implementing leadership and teamwork programs meeting the needs of executives, managers, and employees in a wide number of companies and industries.

Application of her skill and knowledge has been in facilitation, consulting, curriculum development, and coaching. Susan has developed and delivered experiential programs in the areas of *group dynamics, team basics, mentoring, and facilitation skills.* She has worked with global teams and has certified facilitators around the world to deliver management, leadership, and team offerings.

A recognized expert on remote leadership and teaming, Susan is the co-author of *The I in Team ... Accelerating Performance of Remote and Co-located Teams,* and *Quick Guide to Interaction Styles and Working Remotely.*

SUSAN GERKE
Gerke Consulting &
Development L.L.C.
28782 Jaeger Drive
Laguna Niguel, CA 92677
Voice: 949.831.7088
Fax: 949.831.0502
sgerke@sbcglobal.net

Dave Carey

is a sought after motivational speaker, organizational consultant, and coach. As a motivational speaker, Dave relates his experiences as a P.O.W. with intensity and humor, inspiring others to overcome seemingly insurmountable difficulties and gain a renewed sense of purpose, satisfaction, and control over their circumstances.

As a consultant and coach he focuses on *helping people work together more effectively.* He is an expert in team building, organizational & leadership development.

A graduate of the United States Naval Academy, Dave is a retired Navy Captain. As a Navy pilot he was shot down and spent 5 & 1/2 years as a POW in North Vietnam. His book *The Ways We Choose: Lessons For Life From A POW's Experience* is in it's third printing.
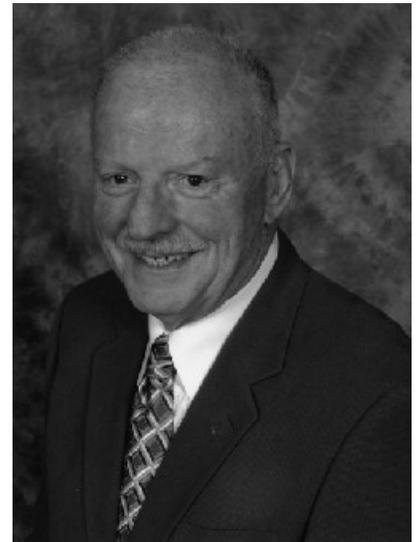
DAVE CAREY
402 Dawson Trail
Georgetown, TX 78628
Voice: 512.819.9481
Fax: 512.819.9482
dave@davecarey.com
http://www.davecarey.com

Dealing with the Challenges of Working at Home, *(continued from page 3)*

If you are a telecommuter and have any of these issues, here are some suggestions.

- Sit down with your family and clarify expectations. When are you "available" and when aren't you? How will they know?
- Identify a specific work space and establish a routine for leaving it "behind" at the end of the work day.
- Spend more time interacting with your boss and colleagues – either on the telephone or during those times you do go into the office.

Have a conversation with your boss clarifying his or her expectations of you.

If you are managing a telecommuter, here are some suggestions.

- Discuss what works well for them and what doesn't relative to telecommuting.
- Clarify what results you expect from them.

Discuss how often and in what situations you need to talk to each other by phone as well as situations that require the person to go into the office.

If you are considering allowing someone to telecommute, have a very frank discussion about expectations. Set it up on a "trial" basis for 60 or 90 days. Evaluate it and determine if it is working for the person as well as for you and the business.