



CUTTINGS

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Compiled and edited by Geof Cox

Clarity of Direction Prevents Defection

Ever wondered how you stop top talent walking when the going gets tough?

Unless you capture the hearts and minds of people, the grass for some is always going to be greener on the other side. How do you stop talent from walking? According to columnist Stefan Stern in the Financial Times, there are some basic points; all of which are, to his phrase, 'no-brainers':

- Provide clarity of strategic direction and pace. You need to know where you're heading and have confidence that your leader is going to get you there.
- Instil trust and confidence in your most focused employees. They most demand and expect clarity of direction.
- Address fundamental concerns. Everyone needs to know what is expected of them, the behaviours they should be exhibiting, the objectives they need to achieve.
- Put people in roles suited to their skills and ambitions. Build on their strengths and motivations.
- Provide the tools for people to do their jobs. Clarity of direction is meaningless unless people have the resources – including the time, the space and the support – to succeed.

- Act quickly. The longer you wait, the more you create a vacuum, leaving your employees to worry and draw their own conclusions.
- Continue investing in R&D. Innovation is even more important in a downturn.

Hay Group consultant Will Werhane adds his comments in their Leader newsletter: "While people are looking for some direction, they do not necessarily want all the answers. A lot of leaders tend to hesitate – trying to find the answers to everything. Involving the workforce and being open and honest in communications is more important than answers."

When employees feel that their concerns are being addressed, that their ideas are listened to and that they are respected, their loyalty is more assured. By failing to engage effectively, organisations lose the discretionary effort that could make all the difference in these harder times.

Discretionary effort is the work over and above what employees have to do to simply fulfil their function. As we have seen in many surveys quoted in *Cuttings* engaged employees are only a small part of the total. Hay Group research

reveals that a fifth of the workforce is frustrated in their jobs.

Employers have to shoulder the responsibility for this frustration. Motivation is in their gift and it goes beyond the pay packet. Picking up the points made by Stern and Werhane, it is quite easy for managers to create clarity of direction and involvement by using whole system and strength based approaches such as Appreciative Inquiry Summits.

These large group participation processes can involve the whole organisation in fast and meaningful dialogue on the strategic direction and key focus areas. By involving everyone, leaders act quickly and operate in an open and honest way that builds trust and commitment. And they are remarkably cost effective as well! A massive impact can be gained from just a half day event on strategy and forward thinking.

New Directions facilitates meetings such as described in the article. To find out more about engaging employees and the use of large group processes, call us.

*Hay Group Leader Issue 8 July 2008
Stefan Stern FT.com January 31 2008*

Teams within Teams

Creating smaller teams within a project is an effective way to split and complete complex tasks. But is there a best way to divide a project team into smaller groups?

A recent study at the Sloan School of management used 62 teams of six undergraduates. Each team was then broken down into subgroups of different sizes with members on different campuses (3+3, 2+3+1, or 5+1). The study then examined the effects of different subgroup sizes and

configurations on team performance. The researchers then tasked each team with writing a collaborative report on a broad academic topic.

They found that teams with subgroups of unequal sizes exhibited higher levels of conflict, had greater problems with team identity, and were less coordinated than teams with subgroups of equal size.

The exception was that isolated team members – e.g. those who worked alone from home – worked

well with geographically dispersed subgroups. They tended to be more efficient, had no issues of ownership, and helped coordinate the efforts of other subgroups.

The answer therefore seems to be that you should try to breakdown work into packages that can be given to sub-groups of similar size. Or work with individual contributors.

*Projects@Work June 2008
Friends and Enemies Within: The Roles of Subgroups in Geographically Dispersed Teams, MIT Sloan School of Management*

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Snippets

A collection of thought provokers and quotations...

- ✂ "People will forget what you said, people will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you made them feel." *Maya Angelou*
- ✂ "We can lick gravity, but sometimes the paperwork is overwhelming." *Wernher von Braun*
- ✂ "Many of life's failures are people who did not realize how close they were to success when they gave up." *Thomas Edison*
- ✂ "You may delay, but time will not." *Benjamin Franklin*
- ✂ "Confidence comes not from always being right, but from not fearing to be wrong." *Peter T. Mcintye*
- ✂ "People would rather do a good job than a bad job. But if you pay them to do a bad job, they'll do a bad job." *W Edwards Deming*
- ✂ "It is not because things are difficult that we do not dare; it is because we do not dare that they are difficult." *Seneca*
- ✂ "If the image means something to you, you can make it mean something to someone else. If it doesn't mean something to you, it can come across as fake and then you will be worse off than before." *Richard Olivier*
- ✂ "The purpose of life is to live it, to taste experience to the utmost, to reach out eagerly and without fear for newer and richer experience." *Eleanor Roosevelt*
- ✂ "The man who is denied the opportunity of taking decisions of importance begins to regard as important the decisions he is allowed to take." *C. Northcote Parkinson*
- ✂ "If you can't go where people are happier, try to make people happier where you are." *Ashleigh Brilliant*
- ✂ "Every now and then go away, have a little relaxation. For when you come back to your work, your judgement will be surer." *Leonardo da Vinci*
- ✂ "People are very open-minded about new things - as long as they're exactly like the old ones." *Charles Kettering*

Are you going forward? Then stop!

Lucy Kellaway has been waging a campaign against office jargon and published 50 of the worst (worldwide) examples (see link below for the full list). Some of my favourites:

"Let's touch base about that offline"
Gemma, Wolverhampton, England

"Pre-plan - there is no such thing. Either you plan or you don't."
Malcolm, Houston, USA

"Apparently, what we're doing in our call centre at the moment is sprinkling our magic along the way - It's a call centre, not Hogwarts."
Caroline, Ayrshire, Scotland

"We've got our fingers down the throat of the organisation of that nodule."
Theo, Kettering, England

"I once had a boss who said, 'You can't have your cake and eat it, so you have to step up to the plate and face the music.'"
Tim, Durban, RSA

"We used to have daily paradigm shifts, now we have stakeholders who must come to the party or be left out."
Barry, Cape Town, RSA

"The head of HR told us that she would be cascading down new information to staff. What she meant was she was sending a memo. And the chief executive persisted on referring to the company as a really cool train set."
Andrew, London, England

"This year's favourite word seems to be granularity, meaning detail. As in 'down to that level of granularity.'"
Chris, Venezuela

"My university department sent this notice out to campus customers: 'Thank you for your note. We are assessing and mitigating immediate impacts, and developing a high-level overview to help frame the conversation with our customers and key stakeholders. We intend to start that process within the week. In the meantime, please continue to raise specific concerns or questions about projects with my office via the Transition Support Center...'"
Charles, Washington, USA

"When a stock market is down why must we be told it is in negative territory?"
Phil, Mexico

"Need to get all my ducks in a row now - before the five-year-olds wake up."
Mark, Bridgend, Wales

<http://news.bbc.co.uk/1/hi/magazine/7457287.stm>

Irving Fields – an inspirational story

Irving Fields is 92 years old. He plays piano at Nino's restaurant in New York. That's not the inspiration! When he was 91, he has his hip replaced. In the hospital his nurse told him to be careful walking up and down stairs making him repeat the phrase, "up-left, down-right" over and over again.

Irving started dreaming about "up-left, down-right." One morning he awoke and he had turned the phrase into a song which he couldn't get out of his head.

When he got home a friend suggested that Irving start a jingle company, and advertise his services on YouTube. Irving didn't know about the YouTube or the web. He didn't even have a computer. But he got excited and turned the original into a song for YouTube that's had over 750.000 hits. Here's the link: <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=gxkuYeERt1c>

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