

Have you ever thought about...

...whether you are a good leader?

Get information flowing in every direction

Step out of your ivory tower to be a good leader

DON'T BE AN IVORY-TOWER MANAGER, appearing occasionally to dispense advice and make proclamations.

Instead, lead from the middle by getting information flowing in every direction throughout your organization.

Follow these principles:

- **Talk nonstop.** Ivory-tower bosses hoard information. Managers who lead from the middle communicate early and often. As one manager puts it, "If you're not sick and tired of communicating, you aren't doing enough of it."
- **Encourage ideas.** Ivory-tower leaders believe ideas must come from the top to be any good. Leaders in the trenches know good ideas come from everywhere. Even if a person's idea is impractical or unworkable, always thank him in person for speaking up.
- **Don't give orders.** Leaders in the trenches don't want blind compliance; they want people to be enthusiastic about carrying out their vision. Instead of just giving orders, explain why you want people to do something.
- **Stamp out rumours.** Ivory-tower leaders are too isolated to care about the office grapevine. Listen for rumours and keep speculation under control by letting people know what's going on.
- **Keep it simple.** Insecure managers use evasive language and often clutter their statements with buzzwords. Instead, speak in a simple language everyone can understand.
- **Be accessible.** You have to be available to lead from the middle. In the 1970s, Bill Veeck, the owner of the Chicago White Sox, literally removed the door from his office on his first day. Soon after, he got rid of the walls, too. **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: *Manager's Edge*, as adapted from *THE PARADOX OF POWER* by Pat Williams

Words of Wisdom

"I like pigs. Dogs look up to us. Cats look down on us. Pigs treat us as equals."

— Sir Winston Churchill

BUSINESS

ALERT!

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Stop making noise — start making sense

by Dayton Fondray

You don't have to aspire to the level of eloquence of F. Scott Fitzgerald to be an effective communicator.

EVERY DAY, AMBITIOUS MANAGERS sit in offices and conference rooms, shifting paradigms, thinking outside the box, and explaining why they missed trends that were not yet on their radar screens.

That certainly *sounds* impressive. But every time I encounter language like this, and I encounter a lot of it as I scan the memos, mission statements, and reports that cross my desk, I think to myself, "Yes, there is certainly a lot of sound and fury here, but does any of it really *mean* anything?"

Increasingly, I fear, the answer is *NO*.

What does it really mean, after all, to "shift a paradigm" or "think outside the box"? These common phrases are little more than exhortations to "think creatively." And if something isn't "on your radar screen," isn't it the same thing as admitting that you haven't been paying attention?

Could it be that we in the business world resort to this use of inflated verbiage to make up for a paucity of new ideas?

Is it possible that we reflexively just crank out memos, mission statements, and presentations full of jargon when we don't have anything important to say?

That may indeed be the case, says James O'Rourke, director of the Fanning Centre for Business Communication at the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business in Notre Dame, Ind.

"Phrases like these are overused to the point of being meaningless," he explains. "People resort to this because they haven't really thought carefully about what they want to say."

"When I see these kinds of phrases used repeatedly in business writing and speaking, that's a signal to me that the writer or the speaker hasn't thought things through."

Deborah Barrett, director of the MBA Communications Programme at Rice University's Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Management in Houston, says, "Writing clearly and concisely and saying something meaningful takes time and energy. "People rely on language like this because they get lazy."

But is this necessarily bad? After all, when you use a phrase like "thinking outside the box," everyone in the room knows what you mean, don't they?

Maybe not, says Barrett. She recalls a time when she was called in to help a major company craft a vision statement. "We started out with what looked like a simple, straightforward statement. At least the executives involved thought it was.

But I saw the jargon embedded in it. So we got together in one room and started looking at the statement and every single one of the executives realized that they had a different interpretation.

It took half a day to go through that one sentence and beat out the jargon and get it down to meaningful words, a statement that everyone in the room could look at and say, "That's it! That's what we mean."

If you want to prevent misinterpretation, it is essential that you have a clear idea of what you are trying to say and then to express your thoughts with equal clarity.

It is especially important in a global economy, where your audience may lack the cultural context necessary to attach meaning to empty boxes, radar screens, or the sports metaphors that are commonly used in modern business communications.

According to Barrett, another trend contributing to the proliferation of empty prose and catch phrases has resulted in a breakdown in the formality of business communications. "People have become careless," she notes.

"They tend to be breezy and informal in their email, and that's carrying over into more formal writing. People are beginning to think that the abbreviations they use in email, and even some of the symbols they use, are appropriate."

This style makes it easy to churn out a great deal of prose during the average workday.

However, when the chummy tone of email carries over into important memos and presentations, you run the risk of wasting the audience's time and conveying messages that are vague and confusing.

"An occasional bromide or hackneyed phrase is not necessarily lethal," says O'Rourke, "but it can be. It may be a warning signal to the listener or the reader that there is less here than they had hoped for."

When their eyes glaze over, nothing you say will show up on their radar screens, and you might as well be talking to the wall. **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Dayton Fondray is Continental Airlines "MIND OF THE MANAGER" columnist.



Simple and natural ways to STOP negative thoughts

LEARN THESE SIMPLE AND NATURAL WAYS to STOP negative thoughts and reduce stress, worry, tension and stomach acid buildup.

You'll stop the negative thought AND step into a more powerful and pleasant place as a result.

Listen to all of your thoughts for a day. Don't try to change anything, just observe when a negative thought comes into your mind.

Select one really persistent thought to work on, eg., worry about paying bills. Ignore the other thoughts for a while.

Each time that thought comes into your mind, say to yourself, "STOP!" You may have to do this 5, 10 or 20 times before the thought goes away.

Notice what's happening when you 'push your STOP button.' Does the thought stop or persist? Does it diminish or seem smaller?

If thinking STOP doesn't work at first, try saying STOP out loud. That's right, shout it out. Notice what's happening when you say STOP out loud.

If saying STOP out loud doesn't work at first, use hand signals for STOP. You know what that looks like. You command it to STOP like a traffic cop does, as if to say: "I said STOP, you numbskull." And mean it —just like a stern cop.

Notice what you are thinking now, too. Are you laughing? Are you embarrassed at talking to yourself out loud and playing traffic cop? Yes? No? Whatever your reaction, try to concentrate on what you're thinking as you do these exercises.

While you are doing these exercises, notice which one works best. Does one method work better for different types of thoughts?

Does the traffic cop work best for worrisome thoughts?

Does thinking STOP work best for what you call petty thoughts?

Now, use all three methods and find the one that works best for you in any and all situations. Use these methods for thought-interruptions and you will own a new skill. **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Submitted by Bernadette Mihalic, M.Ed., Psychology and Business.

Words of Wisdom
Americans detest all lies except lies spoken in public or printed lies.
— Ed Howe



Thomas Long

The view from where I sit

WHY DO UNEXPECTED (and sometimes unwanted) things happen in your organization despite your best efforts to direct what people do?

Chaos theorists have an explanation. They study complex systems, such as natural ecologies and human organizations, to learn how ordered and chaotic elements coexist.

In every complex system disturbances inevitably occur, which produce unpredictable events, which reverberate throughout the system and evoke surprising behaviors.

Yet, despite this unpredictability, a new order or pattern always emerges from temporary chaos.

Why? All systems fall under the influence of different "attractors" that cause them to flip from one pattern to another.

Attractors can be a key to managing in complete systems.

How attractors work

Author Garth Morgan explains how attractors work with this image:

Picture yourself sitting in the early morning sun on an outdoor veranda. Before you is a tranquil scene: a smooth lake reflecting the blue sky and the green of the forest surrounding the lake.

You hear birds call and see them occasionally dive and resurface. You're drawn into a peaceful, harmonious mood.

Then your attention drifts to the room behind you. You hear a tap drip, a noisy fridge gurgle, a radio announcer's voice broadcasting the news. These sounds pull you out of the tranquil scene. You're still gazing at

the water, but your mind is elsewhere.

At that moment, you're caught between two "attractors" that define two very different contexts. As you get pulled toward one, everything occurring in the other becomes insignificant.

Complex systems have a natural tendency to get caught in tensions of this kind. Different attractors influence attention shifts that determine people's day-to-day behaviors.

System flips

As was demonstrated in our imaginary scene, it doesn't take much to attract a system flip.

A famous image in chaos theory is the 'butterfly effect,' whereby a small change as insignificant as a butterfly flapping its wings in Peking can influence weather patterns in the Gulf of Mexico.

The butterfly in China doesn't 'cause' a new weather pattern; it triggers a small change, which triggers another small change, and another, and another until a system ultimately shifts from the influence of one attractor pattern to another.

Chaos theory helps to explain why managing a complex system is so challenging.

Attractors are always in motion, pattern flips periodically occur, and many are out of your control.

Influencing change requires creating new attractors that break the hold of dominant attractor patterns in favor of new ones.

"Any person wishing to change the context in which he or she is operating," Morgan advises, "should search for 'do-able' high-leverage initiatives that can trigger a transition from one attractor to another." **BAI**

Hiring and firing

Beware of the "but for" defense for non-terminations

THERE ARE RISKS IN NOT LETTING A PERSON GO by using the "but for" defense, according to Jonathan Segal, partner in the Philadelphia employment law firm WolfBlock.

Segal explained the "but for" defense for non-terminations during his presentation at the annual Society for Human Resource Management conference.

Example: Martha has been with you for 20 years and is an A+ employee.

She falls on hard times—a sick child; a divorce—and she is working long hours.

When a big business opportunity comes along, the supervisor asks Martha to be in charge.

Martha explodes and behaves inappropriately, but because of her long tenure and exemplary service, the supervisor doesn't fire her.

Then the supervisor hires Greg and in a similar situation tells Greg he wants his help on a big project.

Greg explodes and behaves inappropriately and the supervisor fires him.

What do you do to prevent that non-termination coming back on you?

The solution

The "but for" solution: HR confronts Martha and says, "But for the fact that you've been with us 20 years, you've been working hard, and you're under a lot of personal pressure, we would terminate you.

"Then the supervisor can tell Greg that when he has been there 20 years and works very hard, he too can explode without getting fired." **BAI**

(SOURCENOTE: Jonathan Segal, WolfBlock)



Fun at work — enliven your culture

"WORK IS NOT WORK. It's a hobby that you happen to get paid for," says Richard Burton of Microsoft's Expedia Web site.

We agree: you *can* make money and have a good time, too. Swipe one of these laughter-inducing techniques.

Water wars

Consider this way to help a group adhere to ground rules it has previously agreed to:

Give group members toy squirt guns and authorize everyone to use them on someone who isn't abiding by a rule.

(This works best outdoors, of course.)

Make it more meaningful

Incorporate a sense of fun into your corporate award presentations to keep them from being cookie-cutter experiences and to make the awards more memorable for recipients at no additional expense.

For example, have a chorus sing a letter of praise, have a treasure hunt or a drawing, crown someone with paper clips, or create a bulletin board devoted to each reward recipient and ask for written contributions from the entire staff.

Start out right

At *Business First* in Louisville, Ky., the advertising department sends a broadcast voice mail daily with a motivational message — a joke, a success story, or whatever helps employees enjoy what they do for a living.

A soapy celebration

Hire high school students to wash employees' cars in the parking lot.

Keep meetings on track

Microage Computer in Tempe, Ariz., charges latecomers to meetings \$1 each and distributes the money to those who were on time.

Other companies use a coin bank and charge meeting attendees a quarter for interruptions, tangential comments, and so forth, using the money later for team celebrations. **BAI**

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Business psychology

How to minimize conflict in a family business

by Scott E. Friedman

A business — with its many pressures and the demand for constant decision-making — is a perfect environment to trigger dispute.

NO FAMILY EXISTS WITHOUT CONFLICT. It's just a matter of degree. Some families are so stricken with conflict that communication completely breaks down.

Other families experience more normal forms of conflict and resolve it constructively.

The same applies to family businesses. If families are prone to conflict, a business — with its many pressures and the demand for constant decision-making — is a perfect environment to trigger dispute.

Trap: Conflicts can become so severe that seven out of 10 family companies are unable to make it from the founding generation to the second generation. By the third generation, nine out of 10 have failed. *But it doesn't have to be that way...*

Plan ahead for conflict

Most disputes can be avoided by planning and consensus building *in advance* of the occurrence of actual disputes over, say, an important expenditure or a major personnel move.

The process begins with good family communication. This requires skill and talent as well as an understanding of financial statements.

Just as not everyone looking at a cashflow analysis can understand its real significance, most people don't know how to listen or communicate effectively without some expert guidance.

Common problems

- Stifling feelings instead of venting them, causing them to explode inappropriately later.
- Failing to confront family members for fear of offending them or not showing family members the same courtesy and respect shown strangers.
- Triangulation — communicating your thoughts or opinions to a third party instead of the person who's directly involved.

Example: If a father and his child have a dispute in the office, they go home and complain to their spouse or parent, instead of first trying to resolve the issue themselves.

Solution: Set up a *family council* that is separate from the organization of the business.

Purpose: To facilitate family communication and dialogue ... as well as to decide well in advance how certain questions will be handled when they inevitably occur in the business.

Examples...

- What will be the prerequisites for coming into the family business: Age... gender ... education ... outside experience ... family relationship?
- What is the compensation policy for family employees?
- What happens when a family member marries ... divorces?

- What if someone decides he/she wants to cash out?
- Who will succeed in the event of the founder's death?
- How will estate taxes be paid?
- How can disagreements be most constructively resolved?
- How will family members who are inactive in the business receive an interest in the "family wealth"?

Creating the family council

Family councils can be structured in a number of different ways. But membership must be open and inclusive of, say, everyone in the family over age 21.

This is much different from the board of directors of the business, which is composed of both family representatives and qualified nonfamily advisers.

Helping: In the beginning, consider using a professional facilitator, such as a trained psychologist, to get family communication going.

Meetings should be on a regular basis, perhaps quarterly, so that everyone knows when he will have a chance to be heard.

Though some families may prefer to meet informally, it's usually helpful to have some structure with a designated leader, an agenda of the subject matter to be covered and pre-circulation of relevant background information.

At the first family council meeting, it's useful if the founder reviews the history of the business and how it has evolved over the years.

Recalling the original vision can serve as the basis for agreeing on a current mission statement that spells out the philosophy and expectations of all the family owners.

This simple mission statement can be used to enhance consensus and emphasize family values.

The mission statement also helps the family focus on its own unique formula for business success.

Developing the family charter

Think of the family charter as a sort of constitution for the family business. It can set the ground rules for entering, participating in and remaining in the family business.

Many charters include specific provisions about what education and experience are required to join the company, how titles and authority will be determined, how job performance will be evaluated and what consequences will flow from inadequate job performance.

Important: All agreements should be written down. If an agreement can't be set down in writing, it needs further discussion.

A written document can serve as a guide for the family over generations and prevent disputes from arising or help resolve them quickly and peacefully. But you must also have in place some mechanism for reviewing and revising agreements as times and circumstances change over the years.

Dispute resolution tactics

Many disputes can be avoided by spelling out in the charter what levels of expenditure require pre-approved levels of agreement — such as a majority, supermajority or unanimous agreement of family members.

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Reasons why the present is perfect

"THE PRESENT IS PERFECT" is a frequently-heard saying among people working on self-improvement.

It is sometimes difficult to explain just how this is meant when we are faced with a world in which war, poverty, intolerance and injustice so often occur.

Here, then, are some ways in which the present may be seen as perfect.

It should be noted that this does not mean that the future cannot be better.

- It is the turning point between the past and the future, the opportunity to change course, the moment of choice.

- It is the consequential result of our past choices and environments, and it offers us a time for closure on what we wish to put behind us.

- Just as the acorn contains the DNA, the design for the full potential of the future oak tree, so our present contains the full potential of our future.

- If the present is not comfortable, is not what we would like it to be, then it offers us the discomfort as a way to identify how we want our future to be different.

This identification can be the first step toward making those changes.

- Even if our present is comfortable, and contains no dissonance or problems, it still contains the lessons for whatever growth and changes we choose to make so that our future will be even better.

It is the only time we have. **BAI**

Words of Wisdom

"We are at the very beginning of time for the human race. It is not unreasonable that we grapple with problems. But there are tens of thousands of years in the future. Our responsibility is to do what we can, learn what we can, improve the solutions, and pass them on."

— Richard Feynman

Problem solving

Involve colleagues to solve a tough problem

When stuck for an idea, borrow the brains of others to provide fresh insights on problem solving

NEW EYES SEE POSSIBILITIES where you've got blindspots, so involve your colleagues in solving tough problems.

They'll see answers you've overlooked. When designing Word for Windows, for example, Dean Abramovitch wanted to make Word's line-drawing capabilities easy enough for users to make borders around paragraphs, tables, and pictures.

After puzzling alone for days in his office, he asked a colleague for help.

"Customers really want to make borders around their paragraphs," he explained and drew some lines with a box around them on a piece of paper.

"Or, they want shaded paragraphs, or no border at all." He continued to draw.

"Plus, there are all these different kinds of lines they might want: thick, thin, dashed, doubled." He added the lines to his picture.

"Why don't you just show them that picture and they can click on the things they want?" his colleague asked.

"Huh?" Abramovitch squinted. "Oh yeah! Wow!"

All of a sudden he saw a solution that had been in front of him all along.

"Layers of complicated commands disappeared," recalls Julie Bick, product manager for Microsoft Word. "When users choose 'Borders and Shading' from the Word menu, they are presented with the same simple visual choices that were drawn on a piece of paper that day."

She and others at Microsoft routinely do the same thing. When stuck for an idea, Bick asks a few people if she can "borrow their brain" for an informal brainstorming session. She lays out her objectives and constraints, and "soon we'd all be yelling and tossing around thoughts."

"I ended up with more high-quality ideas because the team members inspired one another. They felt valuable for having been called on to help, and if I ended up using their ideas, I gave them credit for it. This made them all the more eager to help next time." **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Julie Bick, ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW IN BUSINESS I LEARNED AT MICROSOFT: INSIDER STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU SUCCEED

HR Survey

Human Resources is the second most outsourced company function

AFTER IT, HR IS THE MOST LIKELY TO BE OUTSOURCED, according to a recent Hewitt Associates survey.

The Hewitt CFO study, conducted via e-mail with senior financial executives in companies with \$1 billion or more in annual revenue, said that their firms hire outside companies for information technology (57%); human resources (41%); facilities managements (40%) and finance and accounting (20%). The area most

commonly outsourced in HR was defined benefit and defined contribution plans (64%). Other HR functions, besides DB/DC plans, that are outsourcing options are health and group benefits (49%); payroll (35%); retiree administration (23%); staffing and recruiting (16%) and organizational development (15%). Why outsource? More than eight in 10 CFOs said they send HR functions to outside vendors to improve their company's performance by enhancing the personnel function. **BAI**

Conflict in a family business (concluded)

The same can be done for non-financial issues.

Still, no matter how effective a family's charter is, conflicts of some sort will inevitably crop up.

Key: View dispute resolution as a process instead of an event. The idea is to resolve disputes before they erupt into irreparable family hostility.

Again, the process begins with good communication.

Use family council meetings as an opportunity to flush out and resolve possible conflicts.

Example: By explaining at family council why a certain expenditure is necessary to meet customer demands, it's possible to head off complaints from

shareholders who'd rather put that money toward dividends or higher salaries.

For continuing disputes, the charter might provide for a vote by one or more disinterested outside advisers or directors.

Negotiating a dispute through a trusted family adviser is the best, most confidential, flexible and inexpensive way to settle a problem.

Only if that fails should the family try formal mechanisms, such as mediation, arbitration or litigation.

SOURCENOTE: Based on an interview with Scott E. Friedman, partner, Lippes, Silverstein, Mathias & Wexler LLP, a law firm concentrating on business and corporate matters. He is author of THE SUCCESSFUL FAMILY BUSINESS and a diagnostic family assessment tool, "THE FAMILY BUSINESS SCORECARD."

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