
----- WHAT'S UP, DOC? -----

Vol. 2, No. 5, May, 2002 ----- Copyright 2002 by A. J. Schuler, Psy. D
"Creating Leadership Solutions for Profit and Growth"

THIS MONTH'S THEME: INFORMATION SHARING

If leaders keep people in the dark, their people will make bad decisions. Even worse, they'll focus on the wrong things - building rigid organizational "silos," rumor mongering, back office intrigue and other negativity. Guess who will sense the difference first? Exactly: your customers!

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THIS MONTH'S QUOTE:

"Ignorance is never bliss." -- William E. Hall, Ph. D.

1. WHY TO SHARE INFORMATION WITH YOUR PEOPLE

HOLDING BACK SAYS YOU DON'T TRUST THEM - SO THEY WON'T TRUST YOU - AND THEY'LL KEEP YOU IN THE DARK

Employees will pick up when you don't trust them, or give them double-speak evasions to their questions. When you show them you don't trust them, you create an organizational environment where they won't trust you either. That brings many negative side effects, including resistance to change, cynicism about performance incentives or efforts to reward good work, and a general loss of management's ability to lead and get truthful information from those who are working most closely to customers. When you lose the ability to reward and motivate, you lose the rudder of the ship. When you lose good access to customer information, you lose the ability to compete.

PREVENT BIG SURPRISES

Big surprises throw people off. Big changes require special attention and can easily bring negative organizational side effects. You don't have to have perfect information all the time to give people a heads up. The best led organizations keep people as much in the know as possible, without getting people worried about things that will only prove distracting to them. Most organizations are too conservative about sharing information, rather than too open. How does your management team tend to decide the borderline cases: do they choose to err on the side of openness or on the side of secrecy?

TREAT THEM LIKE CHILDREN AND THEY'LL ACT THAT WAY

People in general will behave consistent with the general expectations you set for them, and you set expectations with words and with actions. If you treat people like children, unable to take in real information about the business, where it's headed and what its priorities are, they'll act like children. They'll get involved in petty schoolyard fights and turf wars, and pick quarrels over meaningless issues with management. The result? Management will use this behavior as a rationale NOT to share information, thereby completing the cycle!

KEEPING SECRETS STIFLES INNOVATION

Imagine you notice a new negative trend in sales. You might want to keep it a secret until top management has had time to consider it. But the truth is, someone who deals with customers regularly probably knows why this is happening - because some customer has already told them. This person also probably has a good idea about how to meet customers' changing needs, but will never be in a position to propose a solution - because you never let them know there was a potential problem. By the time they are asked, the problem has gotten bigger and has probably shown up in a quarterly earnings statement. And those customers you lost along the way won't come back. You'll have to work eight times harder just to break even and regain your market share.

CHALLENGING PEOPLE WITH REAL INFORMATION ATTRACTS AND RETAINS THE BEST TALENT IN THE MARKETPLACE

The best people in the talent pool seek out challenge, and challenge requires real responsibility and access to information. Build a culture where people are genuinely challenged and the best will come to you, and stay there. The result? You'll always be able to run leaner and adapt more quickly than your competitors will, and when competitors try to lure your people away, more will stay because of the environment you've created. Top talents like to keep working with other high performers. Customers will know the difference, and so will your shareholders.

3. RECOMMENDED BOOKS AND FILMS

BOOK: "Intellectual Capital: The New Wealth of Organizations," Thomas A. Stewart, Doubleday/Currency, New York, 1997.

Good concepts - not a book to read cover to cover, but one with some good basic ideas about how information and knowledge management and flow patterns differentiate winning companies from losers. This is not simply about technical systems for information architecture, but even more broadly about creating information and knowledge rich cultures with a competitive edge: the ability to create proprietary processes and knowledge bases the other people can actually use and apply (intellectual capital).

FILM:

Last night I saw "Changing Lanes," starring Samuel L. Jackson and Ben Affleck. It's a sharp, tough examination of life "in the fast lane," where money, power and desperation can lead people to make the wrong choices. But then, it's not just about corporate life, but about life, period, with fantastic performances by all. The Washington Post writes, "'Changing Lanes' is as tough as they come, even while its moral is as enduring as the Passion itself: Love your neighbor, turn the other cheek, and for God's sake use your turn signal." Read this review at www.washingtonpost.com/ac2/wp-dyn?pagename=article&node=style/movies/reviews&contentId=A34675-2002Apr11

4. CHUCKLES

Speaking of information sharing, communication and making things clear, here's a helpful lesson from our tech brethren (wink!):

A TECH EXEC SPEAKS:

When I went to college in the 1980's, I heard a lot of words like "data input" and "beta version." They confused me. I wanted desperately to know what people were talking about, what Big Secret resided in the computer industry.

Now that I've worked in a computer company for the last few years, I've gained an insider's perspective. I decided to share my knowledge with the uninitiated by creating the following brief, handy glossary: Alpha. Software undergoes

alpha testing as a first step in getting user feedback.
Alpha is Latin for "doesn't work."

Beta.

Software undergoes beta testing shortly before it's released. Beta is Latin for "still doesn't work."

Computer.

Instrument of torture. The first computer was invented by Roger "Duffy" Billingsly, a British scientist. In a plot to overthrow Adolf Hitler, Duffy disguised himself as a German ally and offered his invention as a gift to the surly dictator. The plot worked. On April 8, 1945, Adolf became so enraged at the "Incompatible File Format" error message that he shot himself. The war ended soon after Hitler's death, and Duffy began working for IBM.

CPU.

Central propulsion unit. The CPU is the computer's engine. It consists of a hard drive, an interface card and a tiny spinning wheel that's powered by a running rodent - a gerbil if the machine is a old machine, a ferret if it's a Pentium and a ferret on speed if it's a Pentium II.

Default Directory.

Black hole. Default directory is where all files that you need disappear to.

Error message.

Terse, baffling remark used by programmers to place blame on users for the program's shortcomings.

File.

A document that has been saved with an unidentifiable name. It helps to think of a file as something stored in a file cabinet - except when you try to remove the file, the cabinet gives you an electric shock and tells you the file format is unknown.

Hardware.

Collective term for any computer-related object that can be kicked or battered.

Help.

What we all need. Actually, it is the feature that assists in generating more questions. When the help feature is used correctly, users are able to navigate through a series of Help screens and end up where they started from without learning anything.

5. CLIENT SUCCESSES

The Board of Immigration Appeals has reduced its inventory of pending cases by about 11,000 cases in the past year, or 18%. The Board is on course to make even more significant annualized reductions in the coming months, as more it is instituting more innovative practices to adjudicate cases quickly - all while maintaining its standards of fairness and review - as data collected by an outside reviewer have indicated. Congratulations, BIA!

TO SHARE YOUR SUCCESS, send your story to AJ@SchulerSolutions.com Unless your message states otherwise, we will assume that your story is NOT FOR PUBLICATION. If you do authorize that your success can be shared in upcoming editions of "What's Up, Doc?," then please include in your message the following sentence: "I authorize Schuler Solutions to publicize my success story in the newsletter 'What's Up, Doc?'"

6. ABOUT DR. SCHULER

A. J. Schuler, Psy. D. is a speaker, consultant and leadership coach who helps people and organizations become more effective, profitable, focused on their missions and able to maximize their opportunities that lead to growth. Dr. Schuler, President of Schuler Solutions, Inc., accomplishes this through speeches, seminars, consulting and one-on-one coaching focused on developing excellence in both leadership and team performance. He has served diverse organizations in the private and public sectors, including The Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company, Sony Development, Nomura

Securities and the Executive Office for Immigration Review. A graduate of the Wharton School of Business, Dr. Schuler has successfully led the profitable growth of a dynamic, international consulting firm while serving as Operations Director, and has successfully coached over five hundred CEO's and corporate executives.

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