Winter 2005
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Quick Tip:
Written by the editors of Solutions

Resolve problems, instead of finding someone to blame.
When a project takes a detrimental turn, it is tempting to highlight a task that a team member failed to accomplish. It is far more beneficial and less expensive to outline a plan to fix the problem that has surfaced. It is a waste of time and resources trying to lay the blame on a particular team member.

Looking for previous issues of Solutions? **click here**.

Vision

On the relevance to public managers of:
The Anna Karenina Principle

By Robert D. Behn, Ph.D.,
John F. Kennedy School of Government, Harvard University

"Happy families are all alike; every unhappy family is unhappy in its own way. With this dramatic sentence, Leo Tolstoy begins his famous novel *Anna Karenina* about the struggles of multiple, interconnected families to find happiness.

To be happy, suggests Tolstoy, a family has to solve a large number of complex problems: How does the family deal with money, with children? How does it divide up the family's responsibilities? How does it manage the pressures of employment? And, of course, how do Tolstoy's families cope with adultery? If a family fails to handle any one of the many problems that all families must inherently face, it will be unhappy.

The only way a family becomes happy is by solving *all* of these problems. Unfortunately, the family cannot solve these problems individually – one at a time. All of these problems are interconnected. Thus, if the family fails to solve any one of them, it will provoke other problems and thus unhappiness.

The same principle applies to government agencies: Effective public agencies are all alike; every ineffective public agency is ineffective in its own way. After all, like a family, a public agency faces a very large number of inherent and interconnected problems. Thus, to be effective, an agency's leadership team has to solve every one of them.

Here is an abridged list of just ten of the many problems that challenge the leadership team of any public agency:

The Macro-Purpose Problem: What is our agency's mission? What will be the long-run public purposes that our agency will seek to achieve?

The Strategy Problem: How will we pursue this purpose? What exactly should we do to accomplish our mission?

This article is continued on page 3…

Verbal Communication

Communicating better at work

Employees often show concern about the quality and quantity of communication.

Some claim that management gives only lip service to open communication but does little to really communicate with them.

Others contend their organizations believe that posting notices on bulletin boards and sending out memos provide adequate communication.

Still others say they receive vague instructions that are difficult to follow.

Ineffective communication often results in poor cooperation and coordination, lower productivity, undercurrents of tension, gossip and rumors, and increased turnover and absenteeism.

Experience shows there are many ways managers can improve internal communication.

Learn about some ways you can improve your communication on page 4…

Creative Thinking
The heart of a leader

People in organizations need to develop a fascination for what doesn't work.

When a mistake is made in your organization, what's the first question asked? "What can we learn?" or "Who is to blame?" Some leaders continue to adhere to the old unwritten rule that admonishes them to cover up errors and hide mistakes.

The tendency is to move from crisis to crisis, hardly stopping to see what went wrong. This leads to denial and causes us to look away from errors rather than toward them – kind of like a golfer who hits a bad drive and doesn't want to watch as it heads for the woods.

A few forward-thinking companies have learned to celebrate mistakes as opportunities for learning. In *The Heart of a Leader*, author Ken Blanchard recounts the practice of one large organization that shoots off a cannon when a big mistake is made. They're not saying they enjoy making errors; they're saying it's time for everyone to learn something – and praising the opportunity. Blanchard believes that other organizations would do well to adopt a similar policy. After all, how can anyone improve if they don't learn from their mistakes?

Workforce Management
Attending work regularly *is* an essential function of a job

Managers are frequently faced with decisions that will impact their organization's ability to carry out its mission as effectively and efficiently as possible. Of course, these decisions are usually intended to have a positive effect for the organization and its customers. However, even the best of intentions sometimes result in costly legal errors. The basic knowledge of the existence of some court decisions is often helpful to managers in knowing when to seek legal advice in making decisions.

The following summary is from a recent decision issued by the Missouri Court of appeals regarding employee attendance under the Missouri Human Rights Act (MHRA).

Case Summary:
In *Medley v. Valentine Radford Communications*, Inc., WD64606 (Mo. App. Jul. 19, 2005), the Missouri Court of Appeals addressed a claim of discrimination, refusal to accommodate a disability, and retaliation under the Missouri Human Rights Act (MHRA). The claim was based on an employer's refusal to allow a disabled employee to work part time or from their home.

It is unlawful under the MHRA for an employer to discriminate against, or discharge, any employee because of a disability. An employer has an affirmative duty to reasonably accommodate an employee's handicap if the employee can establish that with the reasonable accommodation they can perform the essential job functions (A failure to make a reasonable accommodation is also a violation of the ADA). Pursuant to the MHRA, an employee makes a prima facie case of discrimination if they can show that: (1) they are handicapped; (2) was discharged; and (3) there is evidence from which to infer that the handicap was a factor in their discharge.

In *Medley*, the Court said an employee must show an ability to work with or without a reasonable accommodation despite the impairment. Since in this case the employee was unable to work without an accommodation, the question the Court had to address was whether the employee could complete the "essential functions" of the job with a reasonable accommodation. The Court found that regular and reliable attendance is a necessary element of most jobs. An employee who cannot regularly come to work is not able to satisfy any function of the job, let alone an essential one.

The Court held that an employer is not required to put up with employees who do not come to work regularly and is certainly not required to provide an indefinite leave of absence. Finally, the Court addressed whether allowing the employee to work part time or from their home was a reasonable accommodation. The Court held that the position required a full time employee and interaction with other employees which could not be accomplished at the employee's home.

How You Can Use This:
You should continue to be mindful and sensitive of employees with disabilities that do not prevent them from performing the essential functions of their job. However, if you are faced with an attendance question due to an applicant's or employee's disability, you don't have to assume that you must make an accommodation that would create an unnecessary strain on operations and other employees. Instead, you should consult your Human Resources and/or legal department to determine whether or not accommodations are necessary, appropriate or feasible.

Written by: Frank Jung, Assistant General Counsel for the Office of Administration with contributions by Paul Buckley, Labor Relations Manager

On the relevance to public managers of:
The Anna Karenina Principle

The Theory Problem: How will this strategy work? How will the activities and actions specified in our strategy contribute to the achievement of our purposes?

The Measurement Problem: How will we know whether we are doing a good job? What indicators will help us measure how much progress we are making?

The Target Problem: What specific level of these indicators will we attempt to reach this year, this quarter, this month, this week? (To solve this problem, the agency's leaders need another theory – an operational theory that connects progress on the chosen indicators to progress on achieving the agency's macro purpose or mission.)

The Communication Problem: How will we convince employees, stakeholders, elected officials and citizens that our mission, strategy, theory, measurement, and targets make sense?

The Resources Problem: How will we obtain the funds, authority, and flexibility necessary to achieve our targets and thus our purposes?

The Motivation Problem: How do we persuade our employees, partners, and stakeholders to implement our strategy with energy and intelligence?

The Learning Problem: How can we figure out how to improve? What must we do this year so that we can modify our strategy to get even better next year?

The Credibility Problem: How do we establish in the minds of citizens, stakeholders, and elected officials that we are achieving our purposes and making a significant contribution to society?

These ten problems are certainly not the only ones that the leadership team of a public agency needs to solve. Any public executive can – with little effort – quickly add another ten items to the list. The true, unabridged list is very long

indeed. And, unfortunately, if an agency's leaders fail to solve any single one of these problems, they are condemning the agency to ineffectiveness.

Moreover, all of these problems are interconnected. The agency's leaders cannot solve one problem without simultaneously solving numerous others. An agency's leaders cannot solve their strategy problem without also solving their theory problem. They cannot solve their credibility and resources problems without solving their communication problem. And they cannot solve their communication problem without solving their mission, measurement, and target problems.

This interconnectiveness among the multiple problems that confront the leaders of any public agency helps to explain why their job is so challenging. Moreover, an agency's leadership team has to resolve these multiple problems while dealing with numerous and conflicting outside pressures.
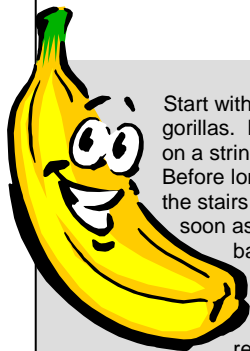
Sure, the family has to cope with the outside pressures from relatives and friends. Indeed, the web of families and friends that Tolstoy weaves dramatizes not only interconnectiveness of their problems but also the interconnectiveness of the relationships that shape these problems.

Still, the number of people who believe that they have the right to tell a family what to do is notably smaller than the number of people who believe that they have the right – indeed the civic obligation – to tell a public agency what it should do.

To create a truly effective public agency – one that not only performs well this year but also performs even better next year – its leaders have to solve every one of the many management challenges that they confront.

A history lesson:

Start with a cage containing five gorillas. In the cage, hang a banana on a string and put stairs under it. Before long a gorilla will start to climb the stairs towards the banana. As soon as the gorilla touches the banana, spray all the gorillas with cold water. After a while, another gorilla makes an attempt with the same results - all are sprayed with cold water. Then turn off the cold water. Now you will observe that if another gorilla tries to climb the stairs for the banana, his peers will try to prevent it even though no water sprays them.

Now replace one of the original five gorillas from the cage with a new one. The new gorilla sees the banana and tries to climb the stairs. To his dismay, all of the gorillas yell at him. After another attempt he is again severely chastised. He knows now that if he attempts to climb the stairs he will risk the wrath of his peers.

Now, replace another of the original five gorillas with a new one. The newcomer goes to the stairs and again angers the others. The previous newcomer takes part in the chastisement with enthusiasm.

Again, replace a third of the original five gorillas with a new one. The new one makes it to the stairs and is chastised as well. Two of the four gorillas that confront him have no idea why they were not permitted to climb the stairs, or why they are berating the newest member of their group. After replacing the fourth and fifth of the original gorillas there are no longer any gorillas that have been sprayed with cold water. Nevertheless, no gorilla ever again approaches the banana.

Why not ??

Because that's the way it's always been done around here.

Communicating better at work

Understand that communication is a two-way street. It involves giving information and getting feedback from employees. It isn't finished when information is given.

Put more emphasis on face-to-face communication with employees. Don't rely mainly on bulletin boards, memos and other written communication.

Ask yourself, each time you give an instruction, if the message is clear. Most vagueness is caused by failing to be specific. Example: Don't just tell an employee to "show more interest" in his or her work. If an employee spends too much time chatting with others, be specific about it.

View information as "service to" employees and not "power over" them.

Listen to employees; show respect for them when they speak. Employees who believe their opinions are valued will tend to be more dedicated and productive. One way: Ask questions to show interest and clarify points.

Don't just talk open-door policy. Practice it by walking around and talking to employees. Allow people to disagree and to come up with new ideas.

Conduct one-on-one meetings. Ask each employee to tell you how you can help him do a better job. Then how he can help *you* do a better job.

Concentrate on building credibility with employees. Managers who lack credibility and fail to create a climate of trust and openness aren't believed – no matter how hard they try to communicate.

Self-Direction
Good leaders believe in lifelong learning

The first step in building an organization committed to learning is a personal one – *you must be open to learning.* When leaders are committed to personal improvement, their employees are likely to feel the same way.

Here are four critical requirements to developing your learning skills:

1. Remain open to new perspectives. You must be willing to accept the provisional nature of knowledge. Keep questioning long-established "truths" to make sure they still hold.

A good indicator of your openness toward learning is your attitude toward challenging questions. Do you encourage dissenting views? Accept suggestions? Consider opposing positions?

2. Recognize personal biases. We all filter information through our own distinctive, cognitive styles. You may need information in written form, while another executive is fine with just "talking things over." You may be detail-oriented and require specifics while a "big picture" person prefers broad narratives.

3. Rely on unfiltered data. The larger, more complex your organization, the greater your reliance on "processed" data. With information screened, condensed, compiled, coded and crystallized into recommendations, you could end up with a filtered view of what's really happening.

Confront and experience what's really going on in your organization. Drop in on team meetings. Meet with disgruntled employees. Talk to customers. Track a work process to see how well things actually work – and how the work actually gets done.

4. Stay humble. The willingness to seek better ideas is part attitude and part developed skill. To tap into superior insights you must recognize that you don't have all the answers. As you become skilled at defining the limits of your own knowledge, your learning will increase substantially.

Peter Drucker, "The Most Enduring Management Thinker of Our Time"

Management guru Peter Drucker passed away on November 11, 2005, at age 95. Anyone who isn't familiar with Drucker may be interested to learn that experts in the worlds of business and academia regard Drucker as the founding father of the study of management.

Drucker has been hailed in the United States and abroad as the seminal thinker, writer, and lecturer on the contemporary organization. In 1997, he was featured on the cover of *Forbes* magazine under the headline, "Still the Youngest Mind," and *BusinessWeek* has called him "the most enduring management thinker of our time."
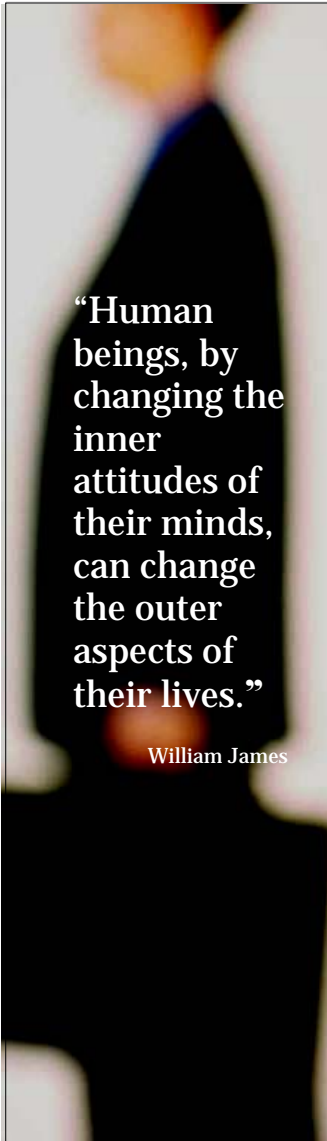
Drucker didn't often follow the conventional view on any management topic. He expressed disdain for the modern vogue of exalting leadership, as distinct from paltry old management. His reasoning was extremely simple—according to Drucker, "The three greatest leaders of the 20th century were Hitler, Stalin, and Mao. If that's leadership, I want no part of it."

In her commentary on Drucker's death, *Washington Post* staff writer Patricia Sullivan quotes Drucker as stating nearly 45 years ago, "There is only one valid definition of business purpose: to create a customer." Central to his philosophy was the belief that highly skilled people are an organization's most valuable resource and that a manager's job is to prepare and free people to perform. "Good management can bring economic progress and social harmony," he said, adding that "although I believe in the free market, I have serious reservations about capitalism."

In an interview conducted with Drucker at his home last year, *Forbes* writer Rich Karlgaard captured a brief glimpse of Drucker's beliefs and philosophies on management. To read Karlgaard's article entitled, "*Peter Drucker on Leadership,*" click on the following link:

http://www.forbes.com/2004/11/19/cz_rk_1119drucker_print.html

The *Solutions* link to *"Peter Drucker on Leadership"* by Rich Karlgaard (11/19/04 *Forbes.com*) is used by permission.

Perceptiveness
The value in diversity

"Human beings, by changing the inner attitudes of their minds, can change the outer aspects of their lives."

William James

The term Diversity can evoke strong emotional reactions. The "what is diversity" stirs many opinions, some positive and others negative. The positive reactions generally come from people who value, actively invite and embrace differences. Sally Huang-Nissen, adjunct professor at the John F. Kennedy School of Management believes that "to value differences means to let go of our preconceived notions about differences. It means an ability to allow different perspectives to enter our world view, thus enhancing and enriching ourselves."

What is diversity? Diversity can be a variety of things such as opinion, color, style, or something composed of distinct elements or qualities (Merriam-Webster). When we think of Diversity we often focus on differences rather than commonalities. The American Society for Training and Development (ASTD) proposes that we not focus on diversity as "our differences," but instead focus on our commonalities.

According to Harvard Professor Richard Light, "One can walk the streets of almost any major city in America and see diversity—but unless you are living, working, and playing together with people from varied backgrounds and experiences, you will never fully experience diversity's most powerful impact, our commonalities."

Whatever your race or ethnicity, the way you handle interactions with people of other races has an impact on lifestyle, work, and the ease with which you negotiate day-to-day transactions in the world at large. Our increasingly diverse society is reflected in growing workforce diversity. Leading organizations acknowledge that working successfully with others who don't share the same background, beliefs, or traditions is a top priority in today's workforce.

"...it is clear that the greatest benefits of workforce diversity will be experienced, not by the companies that have learned to employ people in spite of their differences, but by the companies that have learned to employ people because of them." R. McInnes, *Diversity World.*

Diversity should extend beyond race, national origin, gender, age, disability, rural versus urban lifestyles, sexual orientation, or gender identity or expression—it should truly be about all the ways in which we can add value to an organization, group or society in general.

Written by Cynthia Scroggins,
Planning and Development

Source:
Diversity Training, by the American Society for Training and Development and Cris Wildermuth. ASTD Press. 2005.

Job searching and interviewing:
A continuous process throughout any employee's career

Supervisors and managers are often approached by a member of their work team to obtain their guidance and suggestions on any number of areas relating to professional and career development—including interviewing for other positions. While being mindful that someone else's career planning is not always incumbent on the supervisor, the ability to provide "helpful hints" to an employee who comes to you with questions about interviewing strategies can often help to strengthen the "employee-supervisor" relationship. Additionally, it can open the door to other assignments and opportunities in your own agency that both you and the employee may not have considered.

If you find yourself in need of being able to offer some interviewing advise to one of your employees, the following interviewing tips may help to spur on some valuable discussion related to the employee's future success:

Where to begin…

Before anyone begins a job search, or considers a career change, they first need to decide what they want to do and what they need to accomplish in order to achieve their personal career goals. Having observed the employee in day-to-day operations, you will likely have a good idea of their strengths, likes and interests. Discuss your observations with the employee to see if you are in agreement—and if so, how those areas could fit into a new career. In addition to suggestions that you as the supervisor may have for the employee, there are also career planning professionals in many communities and web sites that offer career planning information. Also, encourage the employee to seek out and speak to other individuals who are doing the type of work they are interested in to see if their "idea" of what the job actually is matches reality. If you know someone in your agency, or another agency who is doing the type of work the employee is interested in, consider arranging a brief meeting between the two, or at least pass along the person's name.

Also, remind your employee that descriptions of merit jobs and other useful information about state employment can be found on the Division of Personnel's web site at http://www.oa.mo.gov/pers/empservices.htm.

Preparing a resume'

Even with the use of new online applications such as the Division of Personnel's electronic application process (EASe), the ability to create an attention-getting resume' is still a vital part in preparing for – and getting a job interview. The resume' lets the employer know what the applicant's strongest skills and interests are and whether the applicant would be a good fit for the position and the organization. It also prompts the resume' writer to spend some time thinking about their specific accomplishments, skills and abilities—an important step in deciding how to best promote yourself. A one-page cover letter that summarizes how individual qualifications match the skills needed for the position should also accompany the resume'.

Encourage your employee to stay organized and keep a record of the agencies he/she sends a resume' to; when and to whom they sent their resume; the position applied for; and the duties of that position. That way, when they are contacted by a potential employer to come for an interview, they can refer back to their reference information about the organization and the position.

Preparing for the interview

Tell the employee to research in detail any organization to which they apply. If the employee does get the opportunity to interview for a job, their research will better prepare them to speak intelligently about the work processes, history and functions of the organization. Then, prepare and practice responses to questions that could be asked during the interview. This can help any job applicant more readily maintain his/her composure, anticipate follow-up questions, and generally relieve some of the stress associated with interviewing.

Further, tell the employee to dress appropriately for the interview and to arrive for the interview approximately 15 minutes early with extra copies of their resume'. Instruct the employee to learn (if possible) the name and title of the person or persons who will be interviewing them so they can have a better understanding of the interviewer's perspective relative to the questions they pose and any specifics they share about the job.

The interview

Since the interview is the chance to focus on personal attributes, remind your employee that once he or she begins the interview, it will be important to maintain eye contact with the interviewers; and use their responses to demonstrate their enthusiasm, commitment to quality service, a positive and confident attitude, and their uniqueness for the position.

Additionally, tell the employee to express their willingness to follow through on a project or task. And, because you are the employee's supervisor—and someone who is familiar with their work, share with the employee a time when they did follow through on a project for their team—and for you.

Remind your employee that as the interview draws to a close, he or she should express their appreciation for the interviewers' time and his or her continued interest and ability to perform the duties required of the position.

Follow-up

Encourage the employee to enter a brief synopsis of each interview he or she completes, and some examples of the questions that were asked. Remind the employee that it may take time to realize a new career, but to remain focused and confident. Remember, the more interviews they participate in the sharper their skills will become and the more comfortable they will be with the interview process.

Workforce Management
2005 Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity

On Tuesday, September 20, 2005, in a ceremony at the Capitol Rotunda, Governor Matt Blunt recognized six teams of state employees with the prestigious Governor's Award for Quality and Productivity (GAQP).

This award, established in 1988 by the Governor's Advisory Council on Quality and Productivity, recognizes service excellence, encourages efficiency, rewards innovation, and reinforces pride in service to Missouri state government.

Each winning team at the ceremony represented a sample of the tremendous quality and ingenuity Missouri state government employees possess. "I am proud of the men and women honored here today," Governor Blunt told the audience. "Their commitment to excellence and focused efforts to deliver improved services exemplify our state's new direction towards improved efficiency, maximum personal productivity, and a government that delivers results."

This year, for the first time, six categories were created to recognize specific team achievements in the area of:

- Customer Service
- Efficiency
- Innovation
- Process Improvement
- Technology in Government
- Workforce Planning

A total of 39 nominations were submitted for these categories, with one winner chosen in each category.

All winning nominations met clearly defined requirements relative to effectiveness, responsiveness, and efficiency of such quality that would make any of the winning projects a model of excellence in state government nationally.

Additional information for the GAQP and specific information about each winning team's "solution" can be found by accessing http://www.pds.mo.gov/erp/index.shtml.

Written by Denise Luetkemeyer, Planning and Development

Customer Service: Telecommunications Access Program

Efficiency: Fleet Management Team

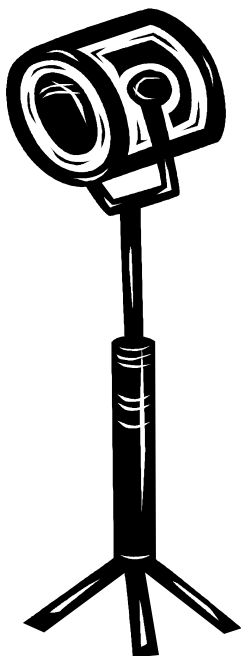Innovation: State Property Insurance Team

Process Improvement: Practical Design Team

Technology in Government: Kansas City Scout Ethernet Communication Network Team

Workforce Planning: Flexible Scheduling Team

Class in the spotlight:
Healing Customer Relationships

Serving customers who are upset is a challenge for both new and experienced service providers. Working with a customer who has had a bad experience with the organization demands extraordinary patience and tact. Research shows, however, that the effort can restore the customer's loyalty, while creating a relationship that is stronger than it was before. In this 4-hour workshop, participants explore the positive potential in negative customer experiences and the importance of working to secure and restore a customer's trust and confidence if or when things go wrong.

Participants who attend this workshop will receive four guidelines for effectively restoring customer trust and confidence. They will be provided with tools and techniques to manage their own reactions to emotional statements from customers and learn specific defusing techniques to more effectively address customers who are angry or upset. Additionally, participants will learn how to take appropriate actions to address and resolve customers' concerns satisfactorily while demonstrating commitment to the customer relationship and encouraging customers to remain loyal.

*Visit Planning and Development's web site at **www.pds.mo.gov** to find out when this program is offered and to enroll online.*