

# Solutions

Performance Strategies for Managers and Supervisors from the Center for Management and Professional Development

## Winter 2011

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## Quick Tip:

Recognize pessimism to turn it around. Say "Let's discuss something more positive" or ask for ideas to improve the situation. Establish a place of safety during heated discussions by reminding team members that personal attacks and blame are not permitted. Request they use nonjudgmental, non-inflammatory language like "I perceive..." and "It seems to me..."

For previous Issues of **Solutions** [Click here](#)

## 2011 FOCUS: CREATIVITY & INNOVATION Bright Ideas

By Michael Michalko

Is your organization locked into the same old ways of thinking? It doesn't have to be. The key to increasing creativity in an organization is to make it start acting like a creative organization. Suppose that you wanted to be an artist: You would begin behaving like an artist by painting every day. You may not become another Van Gogh, but you'll be more of an artist than someone who has never tried. When you reach for the stars, you may not capture one, but you also aren't likely to come up empty-handed. Here are some ideas to make the most of employee creativity in your organization.

**One-a-day.** Ask employees to try to improve an aspect of one work area each day—focusing on an area within their control. At the end of each day, find out what they did differently and better than the way it was done before.

**Positive Thinking.** People shouldn't waste time thinking of reasons why something can't work or can't be done. Instead, ask people to think of three work-related tasks or changes they think can't be accomplished. Then ask them to figure out ways to accomplish them. Then do the same thing yourself.

**Let's Do Lunch.** Encourage weekly lunchtime meetings of three to five employees to engage in creative thinking. Ask everyone to read a book on creativity; each person can read a different chapter and share information about it at the meetings.

**Changing Places.** Have people work part of their day in another section or office. Afterwards, hold informal meetings with the visiting employees to solicit their feedback. Ask them what they'd do differently if they were full-time workers in that area.

**Brainstorming Board.** Put up a bulletin board in a central area and encourage people to use it to brainstorm ideas. Write a theme or problem on a colored piece of paper or card and place it in the center of the board. Provide paper on which people can write their ideas to post on the board.

**Trading Ideas.** Suggest that employees conduct an in-house trade show at which they share "how I did it" stories about recent accomplishments. The show could consist of "trade booths" exhibiting slides, photographs, and so forth to show how employees' ideas and methods were successful.

**Creative Coaching.** Ask someone in the organization to fill the role of creative coach. The role would entail encouraging and supporting creativity in all employees. The "position" creative coach could be rotated among several or all employees.

**Play the Numbers.** Have a monthly "idea lottery" using a roll of numbered tickets. Each time an employee comes up with a creative idea, he or she receives a ticket. At the end of each month, share the ideas with all employees and then draw a number from a bowl. If the number on anyone's ticket corresponds to the number drawn, he or she gets a prize. If there is no winner, the prize can be doubled for next month.

**The Edison Factor.** Let people know that it's okay to fail. As Thomas Edison said, "I failed my way to success." Edison conducted 9,000 experiments before he perfected the light bulb. When asked why he persisted "in this folly," Edison replied, "I haven't failed. I've learned 9,000 things that don't work."

**Breaking Through.** If it isn't broke, break it. Test assumptions about the organization's current systems, processes, methods, and products to see whether they're really necessary and whether there might be better ones.

Mr. Michalko's comments were taken from the Center for Management and Professional Development's online learning system:

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## The faces of innovation: Part 2


By Lori Gilmore, Center for Management and Professional Development

In the last issue of Solutions (Fall 2010), we learned that promoting innovation as a way of life is vital to the success of almost any organization today. In fact, many organizations now realize that innovation is their best strategy to grow in a competitive marketplace. However, to make this happen, it takes each individual contributor to make innovative strides on a regular basis—and that's where all the gold is buried.

In the last article, we visited the book, *"The 10 Faces of Innovation"* by author Tom Kelley, General Manager of IDEO, an innovation and design firm, who suggested that there are ten different "personas" that comprise today's innovative employee workforce—and that each persona had the ability to make a profound impact with the right encouragement. Mr. Kelley divided these personas into three distinct areas—**Learning, Organizing, and Building**. This article continues the exploration of those personas—focusing this time on **The LEARNING Personas**.

It should come as no surprise that individuals and organizations need to constantly gather new sources of information in order to expand their knowledge and grow. Consequently, the first three of the ten personas we'll study comprise the Learning Personas.

Each persona is driven by the idea that no matter how successful a company or organization is no one can afford to be complacent. The world is changing at an accelerated pace and today's great idea may be tomorrow's old news. When we are open to learning new things, it keeps us from becoming too focused on only one or two things—and reminds each of us that we should never be too smug about how much we "know." People who adopt a learning role are humble enough to question their own worldview and in so doing, remain open to new insights every day.



### LEARNING PERSONA 1: The Anthropologist

Anthropology is the study of humanity. It has origins in the natural sciences, the humanities, and the social sciences. Anthropology's basic concerns are: What defines us? What are our human physical traits? How do humans behave? Why are there variations and differences among different groups of humans? How has the past influenced the present? So, an anthropologist is, simply put, a people watcher.

I'm sure your agency has some great problem-solvers. But we also need to know what problem to solve. Anthropologists can be very good at reframing a problem in a new (not only different) way. What is apparent when working with an anthropologist is not necessarily their academic knowledge as much as their informed intuition, or "street smarts."

The Anthropologist brings new learning and insights into the organization by observing human behavior and developing a deep understanding of how people interact physically and emotionally with products, services, and spaces.

### LEARNING PERSONA 2: The Experimenter

The Experimenter may be the most classic role an innovator can play. Experimenters prototype new ideas, continuously learning by a process of enlightened trial and error. They take calculated risks to achieve success through experimentation and implementation. They have a passion for hard work, a curious mind, and through openness, a gift for discovery. *They strive for inspiration*—but never shy away from perspiration.

Consider the Wright Brothers, for example. We celebrate their success with giving us our first airplane, The Kitty Hawk. But do you realize they tested over 200 wing shapes before settling on the one that seemed to work the best? And they crashed seven different flying machines before The Kitty Hawk even got one inch off the ground.

We all know about WD-40, right? Where did that name come from? Why 40? It refers to the thirty-nine failed experiments before coming up with the perfect water-displacement formula and achieving success.

So, what characteristics might you expect to find in an experimenter? Well, to begin with, experimenters love to play—they like to try different ideas and new approaches. They make sure everything is faster, less expensive, and hopefully more fun. Experimenters embrace little failures at the early stages to avoid big mistakes later. They work with teams of all shapes and sizes. They invite in all stakeholders—colleagues, partners, customers, etc. to try out their works-in-progress.

Experimenters make ideas tangible. They treat life as one big experiment and build a framework for continuous learning and growth. The experimenter helps keep the organization fresh and is willing to take risks. The lesson all of us can learn from the experimenter is not to wait at the starting line trying to figure out the whole race. Just get moving and start trying things out. Chances are you will discover a new way to win!

This article concludes on page 3.

## Make Good Choices for Leadership Success

Leadership success is about making the right choices—for your people, your organization, and yourself. Stay in control of your options by following these basic principles:

**Rule of seven.** If at all possible, try to directly supervise no more than seven people; otherwise staying on top of priorities will become too difficult. Delegate management responsibilities to trustworthy team members so you don't overextend yourself.

**Chain of command.** Employees need to know where they should go with questions or to get authorization for decisions. Establish a clear hierarchy—not to restrict communication but to streamline your operations.

**Specialization.** Analyze what your people do to determine what they do best. Look for duplicated efforts, and pinpoint strengths and weaknesses. You'll be able to measure results more accurately and will see more productivity and efficiency.

**Accountability.** Make sure your performance planning documents target objectives and results. This will provide measurable guidelines so employees know what you expect. It also decreases uncertainty by giving employees a tool to monitor how they're doing.

**Correct procedures.** Document process and procedures for every job—what to do, why it needs to be done, and parameters for action. Send employees in the right direction, but don't tangle them in rules and red tape. Review and revise your procedures as often as needed; they can be an invaluable resource for your workforce.

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## The faces of innovation: Part 2

### LEARNING PERSONA 3: The Cross-Pollinator

**Cross-Pollinators** can create something new and better through seemingly unrelated ideas or concepts.

*"Leave the beaten track occasionally and dive into the woods. Every time you do so, you will be certain to find something that you have never seen before."*

Alexander Graham Bell

There is magic in cross-pollination and in the people who make it happen. Consider these examples of cross-pollinators:

- Reinforced concrete was originally created by a French gardener trying to strengthen flowerpots. Civil engineers took it to create colossal dams and highway systems.
- The escalator began as a primitive Coney Island amusement ride.
- The Frisbee came from the Frisbee Baking Company's metal pie tins when Ivy League college students started tossing them around.
- Clarence Birdseye was on a Canadian fur-trading trip in 1915 when he noticed his guides laying out fish to freeze in the cold outdoors to keep them fresh for months. Cross-pollinating the simple technique created a frozen-food empire.

It is easy to spot the cross-pollinator when you know what you are looking for. They are the ones that translate the often technical aspects of ideas into vivid insights everyone can understand. They're the traveler returning to share not only what they saw, but what they learned. They are the avid reader devouring books, magazines,

even online sources to keep abreast of the popular trends and topics. Their interests help them cultivate the skills they need to take one business challenge and apply it in a fresh context.

There is a simple principle to innovation that has been proven time and again: Sometimes a lack of resources and tools can be the spark that people need to seek out and make new connections. It goes beyond the idea that "necessity is the mother of invention." Scarcity and tough constraints force people to break new ground because the "business as usual" method just isn't working anymore.

I suppose our slogan for this portion of the article could be "doing more with less." The less we have—the more we have to challenge our teams to come up with something (often less expensive) that gets the job done.

Cross-pollination begins with people, individuals with restless curiosity, and unique backgrounds who use their expanding abilities to tackle tough challenges.

As you have probably noticed, cross-pollinators are part anthropologist, part experimenter, and part of other personas we haven't met yet. Fortunately for each of us, any one individual frequently has more than one persona. In fact, they may often pull from many personas to become the innovator they need to be.

We have identified the Learning Personas of The Anthropologist, The Experimenter, and The Cross-Pollinator.

**In next issue of Solutions, we'll look at The Organizing Personas of The Hurdler, The Collaborator, and The Director.**

# Solutions

*"The problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them."* Albert Einstein

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## Journey's End: My CPM Experience

By Kelly Levy, Center for Management and Professional Development

It is with mixed feelings that I write my final article about my journey through the Certified Public Manager Program.

While I am happy to have completed the program and know that I have grown personally and professionally from the experience, I also feel sad that I will no longer interact with my fellow cohorts & Missouri State University (MSU) faculty on a regular basis.

The program was challenging yet stress-free; the curriculum educational yet not boring (as some might think!); the instructors well informed yet approachable and friendly.

During the final Graduation Conference held in Jefferson City on December 15 and 16, two important topics were covered—*Situational Leadership* and *Generations at Work: Management and Motivation*.

The first learning event, Situational Leadership was presented by Dale McCoy. In this class, cohorts looked at their leadership styles. The class quickly realized that for every job, there is an appropriate tool. We all know that hammers are great for pounding nails—and while you could also use a hammer to cut a two-by-four—it would leave many rough edges. For that particular job, there is a better tool.

The lesson of course is that to build anything effectively, you often need a variety of tools—and the knowledge of how to use them. Conversely, the same is true of leadership. It is unrealistic to think that a single tool (or leadership style) is all you need to lead effectively. If all you have is a hammer, then all you will see are nails. One secret to effective leadership is knowing what the different leadership styles are; and then knowing how and when to use each style.

Many people fall into the trap of relying on the latest fad to solve all their management problems. They develop an unrealistic assumption of what one idea or another will do for them.

Situational Leadership is no fad. The program has been experienced by over 12 million people worldwide. The program teaches you that there are a variety of ways you can be effective as a leader; and helps you to identify which influence behaviors to use in which situations to achieve maximum success and effectiveness.

On the second and final day of the conference, our topic focused on *Generations at Work: Management and Motivation*, presented by Scott Scobee. The CPM cohorts in this session learned that the teams we are part of in our workplace have never been as diverse as they are today. Additionally, due to the diversity in our work teams, many of us work side by side with colleagues from around the globe who come from different cultures, or who have great differences in personal and professional experiences as a result of belonging to their own unique generation.



Class discussion focused on understanding one another because we realize that ultimately the result is the sustainability of our organizations. In the afternoon Capstone Presentations were made to a review panel consisting

of Scot Scobee (serving in a dual role), and Glen Pace from MSU, and Allan Forbis from the Center for Management and Professional Development. Also attending were special guests Michael Waters, Director of the Arkansas CPM Program and CPM National Consortium President and Julie Farris, President, Arkansas Society of Certified Public Managers. Both individuals came to review the program, and to recognize Missouri's first CPM cohorts for "blazing" Missouri's CPM trail.

Cohorts were required to present the results of their capstone project in 10 minutes. According to the panel, all presentations were stellar and the content well defended.

Now it was time for the graduation ceremony. Each participant was presented with a certificate with their new professional designation—**Certified Public Manager!** Missouri State University and the Center for Management and Professional Development held a reception and a celebration ensued. It was a proud and priceless moment.

Our journey has ended but new friendships and professional relationships were forged; and new opportunities will emerge. Thank you for following my CPM journey.



**Photos:** CPM graduates following the conclusion of their Capstone presentations; and with their CPM designation certificates. Scot Scobee, CPM Coordinator at MSU reading a proclamation from the CPM National Consortium.

## Creative Thinking

# Delegate with the end in sight

When making assignments to workers, it helps to focus not only on what needs to be done, but also how it's going to get accomplished.

Ask these questions to find out how workers intend to get the job done:

*“What do you feel is the best way to complete this?”*

*“How have you handled this type of thing in the past?”*

This feedback can help determine the right strategy, tools and information to get the job done well and on time.

Set deadlines to bring it home—then let workers know exactly what you expect—and when. Sum up with a statement like, *“Okay, then you'll be able to have this done by (day and time)?”*

Taken from **Communication Bulletin for Managers and Supervisors**, Progressive Business Publications

## Tech Corner:

### Improving email communication skills

Email has changed the way everyone communicates at work. Here are some of the latest ways to use it effectively:

#### Getting the message across

**Know when to walk.** If it takes more than one response to settle a question, you might be better off walking over and talking to the person—or picking up the phone.

**Keep it short.** Use short sentences, short paragraphs and short emails. If something's too complicated to explain in an email, you're probably better off talking to the person.

**Don't flag everything as “urgent.”** If you overuse the high priority option, it'll become meaningless.

**Be careful with the “cc” field.** Using the “cc” field can confuse people, because many people assume all emails are addressed to them. Make it clear in the body of the email who needs to take action, and who just needs the info!

**Answer quickly.** Try to return all emails within a day—even if you're just telling someone you'll give them a detailed answer later.

Taken from **Communication Bulletin for Managers and Supervisors**, Progressive Business Publications

## Integrity

# How trust can build a “Formula One” team

Based upon the book, *“Predictable Results in Unpredictable Times”* by Stephen R. Covey, Bob Whitman and Breck England

In the world of Formula One racing, the difference between winning and losing is often measured in seconds. And although winning drivers usually get the glory, it's really a team effort that makes the difference.

When things get intense at work, there are enormous parallels between a Formula One pit crew and your own team work. You have to make complex decisions, sometimes very quickly among team members doing different jobs. And each team member, including the team leader, has got to be absolutely trustworthy. If not, people will lose confidence, the work will suffer—and disaster could strike.

So right about now, you may be thinking, “Why should I spend any more of my time reading about this?” My team is worthy of trust. They're great people and they know how to do their jobs. Hopefully that's true. But perhaps you should be asking yourself, “Is my team really trustworthy? Are we in fact trusted to do our jobs with excellence? And does everyone on the team know the job to be done?”

Whatever your organization is like now, you can help create a “pit-crew mentality” of high trust behavior, a team others can count on without question, and a team everyone wants to belong to simply by starting with three trust building behaviors: (1) create transparency, (2) keep your commitments, and (3) extend trust to your team.

**Create Transparency.** Many people today contend that being able to trust in what is said is at an all time low. There are too many hidden agendas, too much “spin” and positioning. To combat that, tell the truth in a way people can verify and validate for themselves. You'll be amazed at the difference it can make.

**Keep Your Commitments.** Failing to keep a commitment erodes trust—and fast. When you don't match performance to the promise, there's a sense of disappointment, and ultimately, distrust. These days with high-tech communication, the ever increasing social network, and of course, just plain office gossip, it's pretty hard to hide a history of breaking promises. So be careful about the commitments you make and keep the ones you do.

**Extend Trust.** Ironically, one of the best ways to build trust is to extend it to others. And yet, many leaders withhold trust because they trust only themselves. The problem is that distrust tends to be reciprocated. When others don't trust you, you tend not to trust them back. Great performers want to be trusted, and they will deliver.

There is always more to say about trust, especially when it comes to integrating trust into work processes. If you see opportunities for yourself or your work team in this article, and want to build—or rebuild your Formula One work team, there's no time like the present to start. To realize a big impact, consider using the grid below to plan your strategy.

System, Process or Situation	Create Transparency. Describe the current situation clearly and factually to the team. In what ways might trust—or a lack of it be affecting the situation?	Keep Commitments. Define your goal for improving the process or system. Commit to a time frame and keep the commitment.	Extend Trust. Identify team members who should be accountable for the commitment. Make your expectations clear and hold them accountable for results.

## Quick way to track staff successes

As a manager, setting goals for employees is part of the job. But measuring employees' success in meeting those goals may be the most important thing.

Of course, it's hard to find the time to do it, and tracking work progress can be difficult when you're close to the day-to-day work. For help, try this technique:

### Create a "win list"

A "win list" can be a simple text file you create on your computer. Every few days, update it with your employees' latest successes, including:

- Breakthroughs**—when you or they discover or achieve something new
- Goals achieved**—completed projects, and
- Events**—occurrences that have an impact on your staff's progress.

For each entry, list the month and date it happened. It'll make it easier to remember each accomplishment later.

### Let the list inspire others to do even more

The "win list" can help you focus on what's working and remind you how far you've come. It can also help serve as a pick-me-up to employees, inspiring them to succeed even more.

## What Else? 3X Try this tip to engage employees in problem solving

**As managers we know we are expected to engage employees in problem solving; but we can't solve all the problems for them, right? We know that in the long run it's not a good idea to dictate answers and orders. They'll never learn to work on their own.**

In this quest to engage employees we ask open-ended questions like:

- What ideas do you have?*
- What options have you considered?*
- What are your thoughts on that issue?*

Have you ever asked an employee for their ideas or input and gotten a luke warm response? Have you heard these kind of answers to your attempts to engage the employee:

- "I don't know..."*
- "I'm not really sure..."*
- "Hmm...."*

You may not always get a detailed, enthusiastic response to your first question of an employee. **Yet, we often give up our quest to give the employee a chance to participate when they don't immediately jump in.**

Instead, we often give the employee our own answers. We tell them what we think about the situation. In essence, we take over. And, in the course of this exchange, the employee is let off the hook for owning the issue and becomes more dependent on you, the manager, to solve workplace problems.

It's not good for you—or the employee—when you don't allow them to contribute.

**The solution? Some might call it patience. I call it... "What Else? Three Times."**



The next time you attempt to engage an employee in a problem solving conversation, don't give up after your first try. Whether they contribute a productive response or not, follow your initial question with "What Else?"

### "What Else?" sends a message that you:

- Are open to multiple ideas or options
- Expect the employee to fully engage in the conversation and own the outcome
- Leave the responsibility for the issue with the employee
- Are not going to dictate or take over the problem solving
- Trust the employee to find a suitable solution

In fact, when you're met with little enthusiasm from the employee, make it a practice to give the employee three opportunities to add their perspective. By asking "What Else?" three times, you give the employee time to think and you don't let them off the hook.

### Other encouraging phrases will also work. Say things like:

- "What other ideas do you have?"*
- "Tell me more..."*
- "What has crossed your mind related to...?"*

The "What Else? 3X" rule is a reminder that if we are to fully engage others in our collective work, we need to make space for them to contribute. Don't rush them to your solution. Because when you always come up with the answers yourself, they'll wonder why you need them.

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*"Our main business is not to see what lies dimly at a distance but to do what lies clearly at hand."*  
-Thomas Carlyle, Scottish historian and essayist