

LEAVING THE CAVE

The Value of Open Communication For Enlightened Leadership

Don Morgan, Ph.D.



We develop research-based solutions and introduce organizational innovation, providing busy executives with insight and systems to more effectively lead their organizations.

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This article explores how unrevealed issues plague organizations and describes research-based concepts and solutions that empower employees and evolve organizations to higher levels of personal and organizational growth. Both historical and modern works explain how our perceptions alter our view of reality. Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* is a metaphor about the life of Socrates. The Johari Window is a model for classifying what we know and what we do not know about ourselves. Research is presented to show the need for candor and open communication. Employee performance appraisal and 360-degree feedback provide self-awareness and insight into how we are seen by others.

The Team-Based Agenda Meeting (T-BAM) concept is an efficient and effective way to initiate and enhance organizational empowerment and participation. Once participants have been properly introduced to the process, the meetings operate without the need for outside facilitators. Organizations with limited training budgets find T-BAM (described in the last section) is effective and provides valuable mission focused results. Team-Based Agenda Meetings illuminate organizational blind spots.

Many professional and technical organizations promote from within professional and specialist ranks. Recent studies support the value of promoting from within to capitalize on their talents and insights. Colleges, hospitals, mental health organizations, emerging businesses, and engineering companies are examples of organizations often led by educators, doctors, psychologists, and engineers who excelled in their work and are now faced with leading others. Our work is developing research-based solutions and introducing organizational innovations to enhance the leadership function of people in managerial and executive roles.

To facilitate the leadership shift from an "I" to a "We" orientation, MMC draws upon research, principles, and concepts from management, behavioral science, and humanities. Our work is to foster shifts in perspective, promote fresh insights, provide frameworks for looking at opportunities and challenges. We combine research findings, theory, and experience to develop and promote economical programs that energize and inspire our clients' to forward action, and increased organizational effectiveness.

Plato's *Allegory of the Cave*¹ (According to Don Morgan)

The Prisoners have been chained since childhood inside a cave. They are held by chains so that they face a wall of the cave. Behind the prisoners is a big fire. Between the fire and the prisoners is a walkway, along which various animals and other things are carried. The prisoners watch the shadows on the cave wall, and when a person on the little bridge speaks, the echo off the wall causes the prisoners

to believe that the sound came from the shadow. The only language of the prisoners is about the shadows, rather than the real things that cast the shadows.

The prisoners play a serious game—naming the shapes as they come by. This game determines their status and sense of self-worth. It means everything. The shadows on the wall are the only reality they know, even though they are only shadows. They are conditioned to judge the quality of one another by their skill in quickly naming the shapes and they look down on those who play poorly.

When a prisoner slips out of the chains and turns around, his eyes are blinded by the light from the fire. The shadows appear less distinct and he then plays poorly. Seeing the drastic results after a prisoner looked directly toward the fire, the other prisoners rebuked anyone who attempted to slip out of the chains.

All the prisoners know about a prisoner who slipped out of his chains and actually left the cave. He returned weeks later, almost blind. He was unable to see anything other than vague shadows. He was reduced to a raving fool. He ranted about things that were not real and used words that had never been heard before. He even tried to get the other prisoners to slip out of the safety of the cave and venture into an unknown world where they would be blinded like him.

The punishment did not work, and he kept trying to instigate a breakout by the other prisoners. He begged to have his chains loosened, purportedly to flee the cave. He told the other prisoners that the shadows were only images of the real things. Of course they did not believe him and accused him of disrupting their way of life. It got so bad that he had to be put down. As much as they disliked capital punishment, it was necessary, since that was the only way they knew how to deal with the problem and set an example for others.

Now imagine if you were that prisoner who slipped out of the chains and ventured toward the cave opening. You felt drawn to the light. As you stepped out of the cave, the bright sun blinded you. You thought about returning, but decided to stay in the bright light for awhile. The sun warmed your face and arms. The air smelled great. As your eyes slowly adjusted, images emerged. You saw your first real live tree. You felt the wind softly blowing your hair. Wow! This was better than anyone could ever imagine. You saw beautiful mountains in the distance, kids playing in the sand at the beach, couples frolicking in a hot tub. You pinched yourself to see if this was just some fantastic dream or if it was real.

Life kept getting better and better. You thought about your friends back in the cave. Thinking how great it will be to share your new found life with your friends in the cave, you decided to go back and tell them about all they were missing. You expected to be a hero for saving them from their dull shadow-spotting existence. Rushing back into the dark cave, you stumbled and fell. As you got up you were greeted by the other prisoners whom you could only recognize by their voices. Everything was so much darker than you remembered. As you told them about the trees, mountains, beaches, hot tubs, sunshine, rain, and life above ground they tightened the chains so tight that you could never slip out again. They didn't understand about trees or mountains or beaches or hot tubs. You had to make them understand. But the more you said and the louder you talked, the more they resisted.

Plato's *Allegory of the Cave* is a metaphor for the life of Socrates. The escaped prisoner (Socrates) awakened to the truth and was killed for attempting to bring that truth to the chained. Breaking free is difficult and scary. The prisoners were satisfied with their perceived comfort and did not want to leave. How can one explain what he has seen when the prisoners' language only describes what is seen in the cave? Our desire to awaken others to the truth is risky, for if they cannot see past their illusions, they will attack the truth messenger.

Galileo

The Roman Catholic Church led the world in scholarly work through its magnificent universities. Nevertheless, Galileo was imprisoned in 1633 and tortured for his claims that the earth revolved around the sun. On October 31, 1992, Pope John Paul II expressed regret for how the Galileo affair was handled. If the holy church had a blind spot in 1633, there is a high likelihood that all of us have blind spots.

Most of us live in a world of relative ignorance. We are even comfortable with that ignorance, because it is what we know. When facing reality, seeking candor may seem risky. Some will be tempted to return to the comfort of the cave. But by encouraging straight talk from stakeholders, you will soon be able to handle it better, and to value such confrontation! This is the path of true leadership. As a beginning manager, I thought about what I needed to do to be successful. As a leader, it is about others and what they do. It is fulfilling to see others develop, and to see even greater possibilities.

Leadership is lifting a person's vision to higher sights, the raising of a person's performance to a higher standard, the building of a personality beyond its normal limitations. Peter Drucker

Processionary Caterpillars

I came across an interesting example of activity-oriented insects. Processionary caterpillars feed on pine needles. They move through the forest in a long procession, following a lead caterpillar, each with its eyes half closed and head fitted snugly against the rear end of the preceding caterpillar.

French Naturalist Jean-Henri Fabre² enticed the caterpillars onto a large flowerpot, and then succeeded in getting the lead caterpillar to connect up with the last one, creating a complete circle, which moved around the pot in a never-ending procession. He thought the caterpillars would discover their predicament or tire of their endless progression and move off in another direction. But they never varied their movements.

For seven days the caterpillars kept moving relentlessly around the pot at about the same pace. They would have continued even longer if they had not stopped from sheer exhaustion and hunger. As part of the experiment, food had been placed

close by in sight of the group, but they continued in their procession to what could have been their ultimate destruction.

The caterpillars blindly followed their instincts, habits, past experience, tradition, custom and precedent—the way they always had done things. In a way, the caterpillars refused to leave “their cave.” The caterpillars’ dilemma is clear to us, but we are unaware of many of our own blind areas. Old ideas die hard. Military organizations are known for their top down communication cultures. Military men are reluctant to disagree with the opinions of their superior officers. There is a noticeable lack of candor on the part of subordinate reports. William R. Emerson described a disheartening situation with the Air Force during World War II. He quoted a letter from General Carl Spaatz, “The day bombers, if applied in sufficient force from the United Kingdom, cannot be stopped by any means the enemy now has.”³ According to the doctrine on American air strategy in Europe, the bomber was the main, and perhaps the only weapon needed. The fighter plane was given a minor role at best. The Air Force made no provision for an escort fighter.

On no point was American air doctrine more clear-cut. On no other point was it proven so wrong. Like processionary caterpillars, the commanders were unwilling to admit that their strategy was wrong. The German Luftwaffe fighter planes imposed heavy losses on the bomber formations, approaching 50 percent. American air commanders had their original expectations reversed on almost every point. It was the rare flight crew that completed a full tour of duty. Over the many months of *Operation Pointblank*, the cumulative effect on the U.S. war effort from the decision to forgo fighter plane escort was in the magnitude of the Japanese attack on Pearl Harbor.

It does not make sense to do the same things over and over and then expect different results, or even the same results. One mainframe manufacturer saw no long-term future for personal computers; another mainframe manufacturer saw PCs as virtually its only future. Like caterpillars, people tend to mistake activity for accomplishment, working hard for working smart. Like the processionary caterpillars, executives are always busy, but many do not know how to move their organizations from good to excellent. They need help structuring their organizations to achieve superior results. Activity is not the same as accomplishment. A rule of thumb is to praise effort and reward results. I think of praising as a direct acknowledgement to the person. I think of public praise as a form of reward.

Long ago sociologists and psychologists proved that money does not motivate. Yet organizations continue to operate under the assumption that it does.

Johari Window⁴

While researching group dynamics in the 1950s, two American psychologists, Joseph Luft and Harry Ingham, came up with the Johari Window model for looking at self-

awareness, personal development, relationships, group dynamics, and team development.

The Johari Window's four panes (regions, areas, or quadrants) are as follows, showing the quadrant numbers and commonly used names:

1. What I know about myself and others also know about me—**Open area, open self, free area, free self, or 'the arena'**
2. What I do not know about myself that others know about me—**Blind area, blind self, or 'blind spot'**
3. What I know about myself that others do not know about me—**Façade, hidden area, hidden self, avoided area, avoided self**
4. What I do not know about myself and others do not know about me—**Unknown area or unknown self**

Johari Window	I know about me	I do not know about me
What others know about me	ARENA 1. Open – Known by myself and by others	BLIND SPOT 2. Things I don't know about me, yet others know
What others do not know about me	FAÇADE 3. I know about me Others do not know	UNKNOWN 4. Things about me that no one knows, even I don't know.

The Johari Window is a simple and useful tool for illustrating and improving self-awareness and mutual understanding between individuals within a group. Panes 2 and 4 are the areas that we want to shrink. Think of panes 2 and 4 as a personal cave. Listening to others helps us leave the cave by shrinking our blind areas. Being receptive is one of the most important counter-intuitive characteristics of strong leaders. In addition to the challenge of reducing one's own blind spot, a true leader will address one of the common problems in organizations. Too often, the "shared vision" for the organization does not filter down to the people in the frontline positions.

Wise Guy

The Johari Window brings to mind a discussion I had years ago. I was in my first year of a doctoral program at the University of Iowa. I thought I knew it all. I had a master's degree. I had been a high school principal for two years. I had completed advanced courses in administration. The university was paying me as a consultant. One evening I got into a discussion with an older graduate student. I said I was there just to get the sheepskin, and that I didn't think I would learn much more

than I already knew. He told me I would learn a lot more and that I would benefit from the course work and the dissertation writing. How wrong I was. He knew things I didn't know and I didn't even know that I didn't know them. Just as the eye cannot see the eye, the "I" cannot see the "I," but only reflections of "I" through interactions with others. I was in Plato's cave and didn't know it.

Michael Jordan

Take the case of Michael Jordan, one of the greatest basketball players of all time. In 1996 alone, while playing for the Chicago Bulls, he raked in over \$80 million. He had attended Laney High School in North Carolina where he played baseball, football, and basketball. As a sophomore, he was cut from the basketball team. We do not realize how often our judgment of the talent and of the leadership potential of our associates is equally flawed.

"If it ain't broke, why fix it?"

I hear this from managers of companies staffed by what I call the "walking wounded." Some organizations limp along in complacent oblivion, totally unaware of what they could become. According to Jim Collins' research,⁵ "good" is the enemy of "great." "The vast majority of companies never become great, precisely because the vast majority become quite good—and that is their main problem" (p. 1). There is just so much that we do not know that we do not know. I use a computer daily, and I know that I do not know exactly how it works. You know how to get your TV to work, but if you are like me, you cannot explain what happens inside the box when you use the remote. This is not the "not knowing" referred to here. Everyone is unaware of some things affecting their lives. Do you know what needs are operating to motivate others? "Good" is the enemy of "great," and too often we tend to blindly follow tradition, custom, and precedent, just like the "good" processionary caterpillars. Habits, past experience, tradition, custom and precedent constitute a cave of sorts, keeping us chained to the way we've always done things. There are several ways to escape the cave. One source of enlightenment is available through candid feedback from others.

360 Degree Feedback

The following experience was reported by David Lassiter:

I was pilot testing . . . an automated 360° feedback tool that measured management and leadership effectiveness. For the first time I was able to see a side-by-side graphic representation of how I, and others, viewed my effectiveness. . . The results were not what I expected. From my teammate's perspective, I wasn't nearly as cooperative, open, and team oriented as I believed myself to be. In effect, I was unconsciously creating a barrier between the team and myself. The feedback was, frankly, a shock. Immediately I thought of the many reasons why the data was faulty. As the denial subsided, my mind gradually opened to the information in front of me and the bigger picture came into focus. I became increasingly aware, not only of my shortcomings, but of my strengths as well.⁶

There is as much criticism of 360° feedback as there is good to say about it. In a presentation about how to get rid of an ineffective, tenured school teacher, the speaker suggested that a group of six consisting of a school board member, superintendent, principal, parent, a local business owner, and a former student observe the teacher in action. This mixed audience would so rattle an incompetent teacher that he would want to resign. Even excellent people are sensitive and feel vulnerable, and with 360° feedback, there is four times the stress potential of conventional performance appraisals. Most 360s get the data and consolidate it, but fail to enjoin the responders to become part of the solution. To be most effective, stakeholders who provide data can be the most helpful by also participating in the team development process. This is why the Team-Based Agenda Meeting (T-BAM), described on the following pages, can play an important role.

Unanticipated Outcomes of Employee Evaluation

At times, performance appraisal generates negative energy. A problematic situation occurred when I was required to evaluate a direct report who was hired through a government funded program. The gentleman was working in a field new to him and he was participating in on-the-job training. I was happy with his progress, but I rated him average in technical aspects of the job. I actually rated him higher than he deserved for his work during the three-month period. He was progressing and I felt he was close to functioning at the average level. He was shattered because I rated him on his results, not on his effort. The evaluation form did not adequately convey my intent. He quit the program and I lost a valuable employee. When performance appraisal causes bad feelings, the process is counterproductive.

For evaluation to be most productive, it needs to be part of the learning process. I will describe this idea by evaluating computers as if they are employees. When I have computer problems, I have an expert do a performance appraisal, not to get a rating, but for the purpose of fixing the problem. Other times I upgrade my computers by adding software (as in additional training by experts). Occasionally I fire a computer and recruit a new one. This always takes awhile to get back up to speed. With this same approach to employees, fire the ones who are not salvageable. For employee dismissal, performance appraisals and follow-up training are important as back-up, but firing requires critical incident documentation and that is a different subject.

Learning Organization

I prefer a less threatening approach for obtaining multiple-perspective feedback. In Peter Senge's⁷ "Learning Organization" model, people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together. It's the learning that determines how well an organization is progressing and how meaningful are its efforts. It is about moving out of the cave and into a warmer world with exciting new mountains to climb.

To expand their capacity to create their future, organizations require a paradigm shift. There must be ample opportunity to create. Peter Senge identified five converging component technologies of true learning organizations. They are:

Systems thinking, Personal mastery, Mental models, Building a shared vision, and Team learning. In a learning organization, “People are agents, able to act upon the structures and systems of which they are a part. All the disciplines are, in this way, concerned with a shift of mind from seeing parts to seeing wholes, from seeing people as helpless reactors to seeing them as active participants in shaping their reality, from reacting to the present to creating the future.”⁸

Proactive Performance Appraisal

To make the shift to a learning organization, the performance appraisal process can be a starting point for a diagnostic approach to training and development. It is demoralizing for a motivated employee to be rated lower than the highest category unless there is a plan for the employee to achieve the highest rating. From a productivity-oriented perspective, it may even be advisable to forego employee evaluation until a mentoring-coaching-consulting-training program has been incorporated into the process. Follow-up planning is a must. An evaluation that only looks at the skill of identifying shadows on a cave wall, without focusing on possibilities is like rating the number of times the caterpillars go around the flowerpot. Look for results, not activity.

This morning I had an eye exam. My eyes need outside intervention. The optometrist told me that she could not do anything to help. New glasses would not help. For a minute I was discouraged. Why had I been eating all those carrots for all those years? Then she offered a follow-up plan. She put me in touch with an outside consultant for the purpose of a cataract evaluation and probable treatment. Suddenly I felt much better about myself, about my eyes, and about my future.

Jack Welch⁹ suggested that employee evaluation should be clear and simple, with no more than two pages of paperwork per person. He liked to evaluate his direct reports with frequent handwritten notes with two themes: what he thought the person did well and how he thought they could improve. He advocates informal appraisals happening frequently. He adds another dimension by asking employees about their next career steps and who they think could replace them should they be promoted. It stands to reason that if you have no one prepared to do your job, then you are less likely to be promoted.

Think of performance appraisal as a step in the organization’s training and development initiative, not as a stand-alone activity. To use performance review as a tool for organizational empowerment, think about the following process.

Leader informs each direct report about what changes it will take, in terms of work habits, productivity, coaching and training, etc. (1) to earn the highest performance appraisal rating and (2) to be recommend for promotion, should the opportunity arise.

Direct report identifies (1) Things needed to significantly increase productivity in the present job in terms of coaching, training and resources and (2) Things needed to qualify for a more desired position in terms of coaching, training, education, and resources.

Leader confers one-to-one with each direct report to discuss the information mentioned above. Leaders show the “way out of the cave” by focusing on what the

direct report is capable of becoming. Such discussions tend to reduce blind spots in the relationship between leaders and their direct reports. Later, the leader responds via memo or email to each direct report with statements of what the leader will do to help, in light of the items discussed.

Promotions

The most important decision facing any executive is the selection of a successor.”¹⁰ It is in the best interest of the organization to promote the best people. When passing over more senior or more highly educated employees for promotion, it is important to sit down with each passed-over person individually, prior to any announcement, to disclose your decision and also to disclose why you selected that other person and not them. Tell the passed-over people what you want to see happen for each one to be seriously considered for such a promotion in the future. If you do not see them in a certain position, let them know where you see their growth potential and find out if you are in sync with their objectives. These are important conversations to reduce blind spots, even if you do not think the person wanted the promotion. (Note: Qualified does not mean that the person will have a lock on the new job when it opens. It only means that one is seriously considered.)

In *Good to Great*, Collins¹¹ wrote that, “Mediocrity results first and foremost from management failure—from unenlightened and ineffective management” (p. 156). This problem is faced by many organizations that promote professional and technical people to management positions. While working as Director of Cooperative Education at Clarion University, I was contacted by representatives of the Lord Corporation of Erie. The CEO realized that the engineer-managers running the company were lacking management know-how. They wanted three seniors majoring in management as interns.

It was the custom for promising engineer interns to receive job offers from the company. They planned to do the same with the business interns. The interns were sharp, enjoyed the work, and received offers of employment from Lord. However, the program was discontinued. Lord Corporation discovered that it was more effective to promote engineers to management, and provide coaching and training in the area of management coaching than it was to get management majors up to speed on the technical side. The research supports the wisdom of promoting from within, provided that those promoted be given adequate training and coaching to transform these high performing engineers, specialists, or technicians into effective leaders.

A Matter of Priorities

When the U.S. Eighth Air Force arrived in England in 1942, the Americans were equipped with B-17 Flying Fortresses and B-24 Liberators, both high-altitude four-engine designs with turbo-superchargers. Operation Pointblank was the code name for the Combined Bomber Offensive of the USAAF and the RAF during World War II. The RAF mainly carried out nighttime area bombing and the USAAF carried out daytime precision attacks.

The story I heard was that because the U.S. lost so many airmen, they decided to reinforce the planes. They built a life size plywood bomber model. Each time a

damaged bomber returned, they marked the model where the plane was damaged. Soon the model was marked in many places. They devised ways to reinforce the bombers in the places where the model was unmarked. Similarly, Collins¹² noted in *Good to Great*, “What we didn’t find—turned out to be some of the best clues to the inner workings of good to great” (p. 10).

On the other hand, most executives I worked with were initially focused on the expressed concerns of enduring stakeholders (marked areas) and ignored the reasons why people did not stay with their organizations (unmarked areas). If the intent is to keep from losing good people (customers, representatives, and employees), information about the “unmarked” areas is essential.

I worked with a multi-million-dollar-a-year travel company suffering from high turnover. Agents were leaving the company at a high rate. I expressed concern about the company’s strategy of recruiting as many new independent agents as possible and introducing new Internet procedures as quickly as possible (without beta testing). Customer service for agents and customers was treated as an obligatory annoyance. Almost all company training was about recruiting new independent travel agents and helping them recruit other new agents. At the time, the company rejected the idea of seeking feedback from those who quietly walked away. Feedback from dropouts is needed if the company is serious about reducing attrition. With attention only on “marked” areas (complaints from the enduring agents), and not on “unmarked” areas (reasons for leaving), the company will experience high attrition.

Taking an Organization from Good to Great

In his extensive research, Jim Collins¹³ found that **all “good-to-great” companies were led by people who encouraged candid feedback** from the people they led. For example, Pitney Bowes’ entire management team would lay itself open to searing questions and challenges from salespeople who dealt directly with customers. The company created a long-standing tradition of forums where people could stand up and tell senior executives what the company was doing wrong, and say, “Look! You’d better pay attention to this.” All good-to-great companies had developed procedures to face the brutal facts of reality.

In Collins’ matched comparison companies, people (caterpillars) were more worried about what the leader would think than about the vitality of the company (colony). During Addressograph’s “quixotic quest” the truth went unheard until it was too late. Collins¹⁴ emphasized the importance of encouraging candor.

“All good-to-great companies began the process of finding a path to greatness by confronting the brutal facts of their current reality. When you start with an honest and diligent effort to determine the truth of our situation, the right decisions often become self-evident. It is impossible to make good decisions without infusing the entire process with an honest confrontation of the brutal facts. A primary task in taking a company from good to great is to create a culture wherein people have a tremendous opportunity to be heard and ultimately, for the truth to be heard” (p. 88).

From Collins' research we see that for organizations to move from good to great, top executives must be willing to leave the cave and implement procedures to allow the brutal facts to be heard in such a way that they cannot be ignored. This condition of greatness can be readily implemented. The work of Morgan Management Consulting (MMC) is to develop the means to implement such findings. Some smaller companies, departments, and agencies that we work with have neither the need nor the budget to implement the more extensive empowerment programs.

Team-Based Agenda Meetings

MMC promotes the Team-Based Agenda Meeting (T-BAM) concept as a practical, low-cost mechanism to help people create new ways of seeing reality. Develop your leadership team to unleash your leaders to lead. To paraphrase John Wooden, ***The main ingredient of outstanding leadership is the rest of the team.*** T-BAM gives every team member a chance to shine.

A fertile environment is a marker of great companies. Commitment to addressing the facts reflects an organization's backbone. Ideas are the organization's lifeblood. The following quotes are from John Maxwell's¹⁵ *The 360-Degree Leader* about fertile environments for growing ideas (emphasis mine).

Create an environment that unleashes leaders. Create a positive **leadership culture** where potential leaders flourish. People with leadership potential will learn, gain experience, and come into their own (p. 297).

The greatest leaders from history had **blind spots** and weak areas. A group **working together** is always more effective than one leader working alone. If you develop a team you will be making your organization better and helping it to fulfill its **vision** (p. 265).

Great thinking comes when good thoughts are shared in a **collaborative environment** where people contribute to them, shape them, and take them to the next level (p. 200).

Wise leaders shape their people **into a team**. Leaders begin to develop wisdom when they realize they can't do anything significant on their own (266).

If you **listen**, they will be much more inclined to follow (p. 268).

Sometimes the most **critical communication** is from the bottom up (p. 288).

I recommend people learn **shared thinking**. It is faster than solo thinking, it is more innovative, and has greater value (p. 199).

Provide your people with **leadership experiences** (p. 302).

Potential leaders can only become full fledged leaders if they are allowed to develop and use their initiative. Provide a **safe environment** where people ask questions, share ideas, and take risks (p. 303).

Employee attitude is often a reflection of management style. People who do not feel listened to, become disengaged. T-BAM is a mechanism designed to implement John Maxwell's suggestions. The meetings not only create safe fields to address the brutal facts, they also support "shared thinking," brainstorming and creative investigation. T-BAM will generate new ideas, identify and solve problems, spot opportunities, and provide sharp people with opportunities to shine. T-BAM provides a practical way for leaders to see beyond their own vantage point.

More About Team-Based Agenda Meeting (T-BAM)

There is no substitute for learning from others to adjust the way we view the world. T-BAM results in a shared team and corporate vision. Carrie Morgan, our Seattle-based consultant, contributed this key component to the Leadership by Objectives program. T-BAM was developed before LBO and has proven to be effective for bringing vital information into the organization. The process includes an optional individual performance review process. T-BAMs are effective team development activities and reduce organizational blind spots.

The process is easy and inexpensive to implement. T-BAMs are routinely scheduled at least two times a month, and more frequently during the first year of adoption. After the first two-hour meeting led by a trained facilitator, the group members will be capable of facilitating their own meetings, which usually last 30 to 45 minutes. The boss/manager/supervisor assumes the role of an equal participant. Lengthy meetings are rarely necessary. At the introductory meeting, our coach models the facilitator role and demonstrates how to create the liberty for all participants to be heard. It is the outside facilitator who moderates control by the boss.

T-BAMs are rich exchanges for everyone to be heard—to voice their creative ideas, concerns, and information that will benefit the team. Everyone benefits as several people share their unique perspectives and insights. By adhering to T-BAM principles in other meetings, associates feel their time is well used. In every company that we introduced and facilitated T-BAMs, they considered these meetings overwhelmingly successful. Even greater than batting 1000, is seeing employees embrace the concept and quickly learn to facilitate their own T-BAMs.

T-BAMs help to align superiors and subordinates with the organization's common purpose. The result is a unified team working together with a single set of objectives, values and working processes. Examples of issues that have been successfully addressed in T-BAMs are: the desire to deal directly with creative solutions, cost reductions, internal brief sign-off processes, evolving roles and responsibilities, corporate culture issues, and improving standard procedures.

T-BAMs promote leadership and community. The meetings are structured to efficiently gather field intelligence, to promote communication, to make the organization smarter and to avoid repetitive mistakes. T-BAM is similar to a symphony rehearsal—getting all the voices in harmony. This is what leadership is all about. The objective is to get everyone on the same page and singing the same song. This participation is a way to gain support and to profit from diversity of knowledge and viewpoints. When management and employees participate in the

process, they develop ownership for both the process and the outcome. Having their concerns heard gives people recognition and status.

Merged units use Team-Based Agenda Meetings to get people talking with each other by sharing perceptions, experiences, and knowledge. Trust and commitment is the result. Better working relationships develop as they share problems and generate solutions. The proactive process focuses on the next steps. Team members learn to anticipate each other's moves and work flow improves.

Plato observed that knowledge is not transferred from leader to follower, but rather that by directing people's minds toward what is real and important and by allowing them to apprehend it for themselves, learning happens. This is the essence of leadership.

Endnotes

¹ Based on Plato's *Book 7 of Republic* (514A-520A).

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¹⁰ Collins, Jim, et al. (2001). *Good to Great*, HarperCollins, New York.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Ibid.

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Maxwell, John C. (2005). *The 360-Degree leader*, Thomas Nelson, Inc, Nashville.



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