

Fluency: Leading in the Midst of Change

Some of you may remember the 1985 hit song, "We are the World," produced by Quincy Jones and an inspiring cast of musicians who sang about working together, past our differences. Or perhaps you remember the tremendously successful United Colours of Benetton ad campaign back in the 1980s, celebrating young faces of every colour, signalling the look and feel of a world without borders. Media images like these showed us the world and nation, as we wanted ourselves to be -- pictures and soundbites of many races cooperating, communicating, and sharing opportunity and fortune.

If only it were that simple. Almost 25 years later, we are still struggling to make that vision real -- in our business practices, in the running of our cities, and, now, in the context of great cultural, demographic, and economic changes brought on by globalization.

As 21st century leaders, you know that building, guiding, and sustaining truly diverse communities is tremendously difficult work. Over the last decade, city populations and workforces have changed faster than at any point in history -- job relocation, mobile commerce and ease of travel have changed our cities' demographics quickly and often.

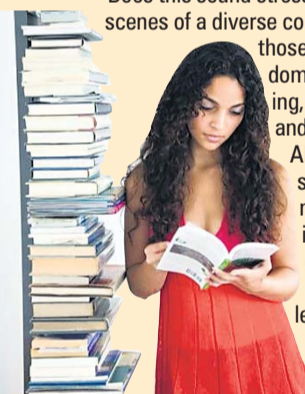
Immigrant and new communities continue to influence and change the culture of our cities. Young families and children supplant the aging baby boomer generation, again, changing the character and priorities of a community.

At the same time as we become a more diverse, more prosperous nation, our cities have also become more segregated. In fact, studies from SUNY Albany, UCLA, and the Harvard Graduate School of Education have reported that segregation of our children has worsened over the last decade, even as we live in more integrated areas. As newcomer groups grow in critical mass, so does the tendency to organize along racial, ethnic, or other group-affiliated lines. Changing demographics and the growth of ethnic enclaves have made race awareness and identity politics an effective means of voicing the needs of some of our cities' otherwise marginalized groups.

Amid all of this, civic and corporate leaders are confronted with difficult choices every day. Worthy projects from different community sectors must compete for limited resources. Appointments and commissions must be assigned in ways that satisfy all the interests represented in our constituency groups, assuring each of them adequate representation. From time to time, leaders also face crisis-fueled change, forcing them to guide their communities quickly through controversies.

Does this sound stressful? Indeed, scenes of a diverse community can be those of chaos, fiefdoms, even balkanizing, as some futurists and scholars predict. Alternatively, some see these times as momentous, opening the door to the grandest and most inspiring of challenges.

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Motivation and solving of face conflicts

THE CONSCIENTIOUS and well-meaning owner of a small business cannot seem to get his work force motivated, despite a good benefits package and pleasant working environment. "I am coming to the conclusion that it doesn't pay to be nice to people," he says. "Maybe if I fired a few of them I'd get better results."

The supervisor of a 100-employees division of a large company says his employees are demoralized; he wants to know ways to increase their motivation.

An office manager is stunned to find out that two of her best employees told another supervisor she did not like them. "They are both top performers, and I can never remember being dissatisfied with them in any way," she says. "What's happening?"

These managers are discovering that managing means managing people. In the course of consulting and column writing I have found that the two major problem areas for managers are how to motivate and how to reduce conflict.

Take the owner who is contemplating firing some of his employees. It is not that he is doing something wrong by giving them a handsome benefits package and good working conditions. He is just not doing enough. If you are in his situation you should ask yourself these questions: Do your employees participate in decision making? Do they have promotion opportunities? Do they think you have made promises you have not fulfilled? Do you reward them for initiative and superior performance?

People will work for money, but except in extreme circumstances, they resist working for money alone. They also want recognition, security and opportunity. There is, accordingly, a simple solution for the supervisor of those 100 demoralized employees: Tell them "thank you."

It is human nature to like praise and to be motivated to work for it. I often tell my clients, "Do you want to make \$1,000 in five minutes? Go and give an employee a word of praise. His work rate will increase, his motivational level will rise, and he will pass along his good mood to others."

And you must be aware that all the good work and good feeling you build up can be destroyed in ways you little expect. Take the supervisor who was amazed to find out that her two best employees thought she disliked them.

It can happen like this: The manager is worried about a procurement problem. Frank, the employee, passes the manager in the corridor and greets her with a smile.



The manager, engrossed in her problem, looks up briefly and mumbles a reply. Frank's mood drops. He wonders why she is angry with him, what he did, whether he is doing a good job.

The next day, the procurement problem takes a turn for the worse. Frank tries again. This time the manager does not even respond. Frank's worst fears are confirmed. And the manager does not even realize it.

Why does this happen? Employees are constantly gauging their job security and their employer's satisfaction with their performance by the expression they see on the manager's face.

OFFICE CONFLICT at its worst is caused by a deliberate troublemaker. Here is a typical case: "I work with a manager who constantly criticizes me and the other managers. He likes to show my boss how knowledgeable he is and how he is the only guy who can 'get anything done around here.' The boss laps it up, and the two of them have lengthy conferences discussing all the employees. This guy is bent on climbing to the top over our bodies. What should we do?"

These professional conflict makers create morale problems, credibility problems and eventual productivity problems. They

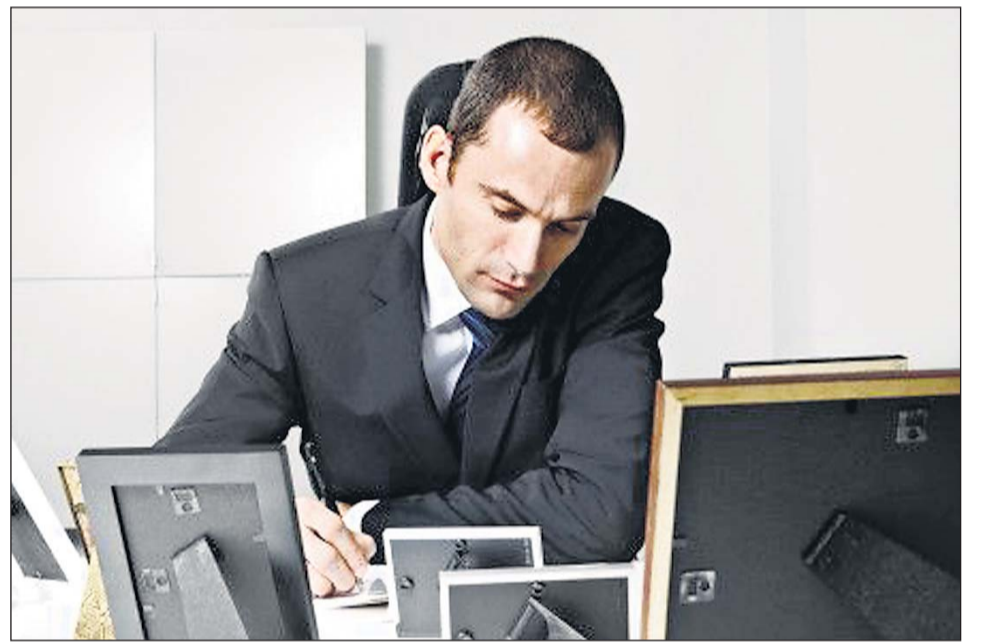
can be cunning and vicious, but they flourish only where the boss is a willing participant.

Professional conflict makers devote so much of their energies to criticizing others' performances that their own tasks are neglected. You can find subtle ways of pointing that out to their superiors.

Worth noting is that professional conflict makers rarely confine their volleys to employees. Their highly critical appraisals usually include disparaging remarks about the boss and his management style. At the appropriate time, you might wish to

share with your boss your concerns about the damage being done to his own image in the eyes of the employees. By the way, bring along a witness or two. It will enhance your credibility. Keep your remarks dispassionate, and your boss will see the light.

A high level of employee motivation can make a company grow and flourish. Human conflict can reduce productivity and increase turnover. Business owners would be well advised to regularly monitor both. For a business they can spell life or death. - findarticles.com



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Impressive titles are more than cheap rewards

More and more organizations are doling out impressive-sounding job titles, many including superlatives such as 'chief'. One reason is to stop key executives from leaving, according to Michael Jalbert, president of MRINetwork, a major search and recruitment organization. But titles such as chief marketing officer, chief innovation officer, and chief risk officer also mark the extra responsibilities that CEOs are delegating to senior staff.

Michael Jalbert said: "CEOs and presidents of companies realize that running a successful business requires an effective leadership team. Many top executives have more autonomy in the running of their departments than ever before. This results in a greater sense of ownership and fosters loyalty." Jalbert considers that 'chief' titles are best used to signal strategically important issues in the organization. For example, banks often have a chief risk officer now to make sure that they are in compliance with laws governing accountability.

And many businesses have a chief marketing officer to show the importance of customer acquisition. But organizations expect results in return for these titles. "If the CMO can't deliver results fast enough - such as increase market share and improve brand awareness - they don't last long," said Jalbert. Retaining top talent is a particular problem in organizations with flat structures. Inventing posts with prestige titles is one of the few options to keep employees happy in their careers. "Some of the more creative 'chief' titles cater to the desires of up-and-coming managers to possess titles that reflect what they do. This generation of workers is unimpressed with traditional titles and impatient to get ahead. They're also willing to change jobs to get what they want," he said. But 'title creep' can be counter-productive. Jobs that do not deliver on impressive titles repel rather than retain talent. "People can easily see through new titles that offer prestige in name only. If the job doesn't also

bring added responsibility and recognition, employees can feel that they are being manipulated," said Jalbert, observing that the title "vice president" has become so common that it is almost meaningless.

"Meaningful recognition within the organization is critical," said Jalbert. "Mere titles won't suffice in the long term."

Celebrity CEOs

Executive titles, rewards and personal self-belief are intertwined. Mathew Hayward of the University of Colorado at Boulder and co-authors Violina Rindova and Timothy Pollock of the R. H. Smith School of Business at the University of Maryland at College Park published an intriguing paper "Believing One's Own Press: The Causes and Consequences of CEO Celebrity," in the July 2004 issue of Strategic Management Journal. In this paper they pointed to the unhealthy relationship between CEOs' belief in themselves and the way they were written up in the media. They argued that executives should not believe their own press because it tended to become bad news for their organizations. According to Mathew Hayward, who has since written a book on the same theme (Ego Check: Why Executive Hubris is Wrecking Companies and Careers and How to Avoid the Trap), journalists often create an inflated image of CEOs by attributing their organizations' positive performances solely to their CEOs' strategic actions. The trouble begins, said Hayward, when they start to believe the hype. "What you have is journalists affecting the outcome of how

businesses are run by affecting the CEO," Hayward said. "Once CEO celebrities are created, they tend to believe the hype and see themselves as invincible. I think this has greatly contributed to the CEO excesses we have seen over the past few years."

The public are fascinated by celebrities and perhaps the media is just giving the public what it wants, more celebrities. But Hayward says there's more to it than that: "The public want to believe that individuals are in control, so they happily accept these accounts as being true."

When CEOs display idiosyncratic personal behaviour in public, it becomes easier for journalists to provide accounts that bolster attributions of the firm's action to its CEO.

"By and large this is very dysfunctional for the company, because when CEOs buy into their own celebrity, they will tend to want to have the company revolve around them. Most notably they will want to continue the behaviour and actions that got them on the magazine cover, which isn't necessarily good for the company." - hrmguide.com

