

If meetings are the corporate playing field, what is your score?



// YOUR CAREER //

ARE YOU A MEETING MENACE OR MASTER?

By Reldan S. Nadler

Inside **INTELLIGENCE //**

Age issues/ Google buys a wiki	12
Skills gap questions/ Training entrepreneurs	15
The key to survival/ Tenure counts	16
Coaching preferences/ Cool tool/ Fast fact about difficult discussions	17

In many organizations, more than 50 percent of an executive's time is spent in meetings. They are the primary communication tool of leaders and, consequently, the arena where leaders showcase their management skills.

When used well, meetings can increase team performance and build a leader's credibility. When used poorly, in an undisciplined way, they can waste the organization's time and money and derail leadership integrity.

Many leaders don't properly prepare the content or themselves emotionally for meetings. Because of that, they often turn into "meeting menaces" during the discussion. These leaders don't listen; instead, they over-talk, interrogate others, limit discussion of differing ideas and opinions, and easily get angry and defensive. Often, the loudest, most con-

and what they want their people to think about.

"Ante up." Get everyone to say something at the start of the meeting. Just like the blackjack dealer won't let you play unless you have your money up, meeting members need to get involved right away or they are not totally in the meeting. Consider asking "leadership check-in" questions that each participant must respond to, such as:

- Who on this team has supported you in the last week?
- Describe one customer success you had last week?

When used well, meetings can increase team performance and build a leader's credibility. When used poorly, they can waste the organization's time and money and derail leadership integrity.

fidest senior voice makes the decisions, while everyone else just listens, only to vent their real feelings later. This not only leads to poor decision making, but also a negative workplace climate.

Those who have mastered the art of conducting and participating in meetings are prepared for each discussion and appreciate the visibility that meetings provide. Their discussions are more productive and their employees feel that their contributions are valued. Follow their example by employing these tactics at your next meeting:

Set an agenda. Create an agenda and send it to participants one or two days before the meeting.

Be clear. Start the meeting by stating its purpose and objectives and identify who is going to make each decision. For example, some portions of the meeting may be informational. Others may require participants' input so that you or the group can make a decision. Remember, great leaders direct how

- How do you recharge yourself?
 - On a scale of 10, how do you rate our communication to the organization?
- Recognize contributions.** Acknowledging others in the meeting or having others make an acknowledgement is very powerful when done in front of peers.
- Connect the dots.** During the meeting, frequently explain how specific actions are contributing to the direction or vision of the company or department.
- Summarize.** At the end of the meeting, summarize the agreed-upon actions and the people responsible for them as well as time frames and resources available.

Reldan S. Nadler is a psychologist, executive coach, corporate trainer, and author of *Leaders' Playbook* on which this article is based. He is CEO of True North Leadership in Santa Barbara, California; Rnadler@truenorthleadership.com.

Meeting Menace Checklist



Check the box if you have noticed the behavior in yourself, a direct report, or a peer at least once in a two-month period.

Do you:

- get irritated, upset, or angry in a meeting
- interrupt people frequently during a meeting
- use questions like weapons (They are not really questions, but disguised statements.)
- over-talk issues and advocate only your ideas
- prevent people from managing or interacting with you
- make disagreements a grand performance
- fail to build on others' ideas
- refuse to acknowledge others
- put others on the spot and urge them to express an opinion about a conflict
- indulge in debating without realizing that others are uncomfortable and may see it as conflict or confrontation
- come to the meeting unprepared and ask questions that have already been covered
- interrogate others about your point of view in a condescending manner?

Score

If you checked three or more boxes, then you are (or your direct report or peer is) a meeting menace.

// IN THE NEWS //

GOOGLE BUYS A WIKI COMPANY



IN NOVEMBER, GOOGLE BOUGHT JOTSPOT, an emerging wiki company. JotSpot, a privately held company headquartered in Palo Alto, California, was founded in 2004 by Excite.com co-founders Joe Kraus and Graham Spencer.

While other wikis typically support plain text, JotSpot's wiki enables users to create rich web-based spreadsheets, calendars, documents, and photo galleries. According to Elliott Masie's newsletter, *Learning Trends*, "JotSpot had one of the most application-rich wikis on the market, targeted to organizations that wanted collective documents with more user access controls and embedded applications."

Why is Google acquiring JotSpot? According to JotSpot's website, "Google shares JotSpot's vision for helping people collaborate, share, and work together online. JotSpot's team and technology are a strong fit with existing Google products like Google Docs and Spreadsheets, Google Apps for Your Domain, and Google Groups."

MORE/ www.jotspot.com

// GENERATIONAL ISSUES //

Age Not an Issue

While there has been so much news about generational differences in the workplace, one study shows that age may not matter when it comes to managing.

Eighty-four percent of workers polled by OfficeTeam, a staffing service based in Menlo Park, California, said they would be comfortable reporting to a manager who is younger than they are, and 89 percent said they wouldn't mind supervising employees older than themselves.

The survey questioned 567 working adults employed in office environments. When asked, "How comfortable would you be reporting to a manager who is younger than you?" more than half (51 percent) said that they would be very comfortable. Eleven percent said that they would be somewhat uncomfortable and 3 percent said that they would be very uncomfortable.

Those numbers jumped when participants were asked about managing an older worker. Seventy percent said that they would be very comfortable managing someone who is older.

"For the first time in history, four generations of employees are in the workforce," says Diane Domeyer, executive director of OfficeTeam. "Companies recognize the benefits of having diverse, well-rounded teams, and employees may be just as likely to report to a younger supervisor as an older one. In either case, the boss's management abilities are more of a factor in employee job satisfaction than his age."

Domeyer added that employees should be recognized more for performance than tenure with a company. "In an ideal office setting, managers and staff are focused on the skills and knowledge people bring to their roles, not what year they were born," she says.



// SMALL BUSINESS UPDATE //

Training Future Business Owners

By David Zahn

WHILE MANY PEOPLE DREAM OF OWNING BUSINESSES, FEW OF THEM SUCCEED. According to the Small Business Administration, less than half—44 percent—of new employer establishments survive at least four years. Sadly, the very reasons that lead people to start their own businesses often contribute to their downfalls.

The good news is that many of these failures are preventable when small business owners receive the proper training. The challenge for trainers, however, is to understand their unique backgrounds and needs, which these participants do not always recognize or implicitly state.

Many entrepreneurs have loads of experience in one subject area and enter the business world focusing on perfecting their specific product or service. They frequently forget that others will not intuitively understand their solutions as they do. Therefore, they must work on communicating how their solution works and justifying its cost to the public. (In addition, many will need lessons on basic business skills, such as managing cash flow, marketing, or making personnel decisions.)

Prioritization and opportunity identification also are not strong suits of many entrepreneurs. They rarely turn down an opportunity, even if that means creating a customized product or service to satisfy a single customer. And after a while, the original service ceases to exist and every project is customized with no clear process in place to manage the brand.

Remember, small business owners often work long hours and perceive their time as scarce. They'll resist training if it disrupts



their schedules and takes time away from “more important” responsibilities.

Solutions

Rather than expecting the participants to leave their businesses and attend classroom training, trainers may find it more effective to create materials that can be accessed on the job by these business owners. Some of the approaches that they will appreciate include

- brief, information-packed interviews with experts who address common business issues, “how-tos,” and case studies, which can be viewed or downloaded online
- networking opportunities via bulletin boards, webcasts, blogs, or other venues that allow remote access without requiring users to be available at an exact time
- self-study methods that include previously published articles that focus on essential facts or skills.

David Zahn is president of StartUpBuilder.com; davidzahn@startupbuilder.com.

// IN PRACTICE //

Facing a Skills Gap?

In a new ASTD whitepaper, “Bridging the Skills Gap,” experts weigh in on how skills shortages threaten growth and competitiveness in organizations. They say the following four signs indicate that an organization may be facing a skills gap:

- 1. There is a mismatch between the skills that the organization needs (current and future) and the capabilities of the workforce.**
- 2. The organization did not train employees during hard times and is struggling to catch up.**
- 3. The number of highly skilled, specialized jobs needed to take the organization forward is increasing.**
- 4. There is a high percentage of baby boomers in the workforce that are or will be leaving soon.**

ADAPTABILITY: Key to Survival

Organizational change is on the rise and leaders need to cultivate more agile companies to cope, according to new research from the American Management Association and the Human Resources Institute.

Of the 1,472 managers and HR experts from around the world who participated in the survey, "Agility and Resilience in the Face of Continuous Change," approximately 70 percent said that their organizations experienced disruptive change (defined as severe surprises or unanticipated shocks) during the last year. And more than 80 percent said that the pace of change is speeding up in organizations all over the world.

"While we talk about the need for organizations to be agile and resilient, it is easier said than done. The management of organizational change is a challenge, one that we must study continually if we are to identify the skill sets we need to cope with it at today's ever-accelerating pace," says Edward T. Reilly, president and CEO of AMA.

Reilly also notes that leaders can do a lot to foster adaptable organizations. In particular, they must guard against creating functional silos, taking excessive decision-making

steps, restricting the flow of information, and ignoring others' ideas.

"While strategic agility and resilience are very much a function of an organization as a whole, they also are the sum of its processes, policies, technologies, structures, and creators," he adds.

When asked to compare disruptiveness in their organizations today with disruptiveness during the previous five years, about 37 percent of participants said that their organizations had experienced more shocks and surprises, compared with only 19 percent who said there were fewer and less-frequent disruptions.

According to Reilly, dealing with substantive change is not likely to get any easier either. In fact, some companies like disruption, and they're often the ones setting the pace in their industries. After all, he points out, what's disruptive for one organization might seem perfectly manageable for another.

MORE/ www.amanet.org/research

Look Before You Leap

Chronic job hoppers may bounce themselves out of consideration for new positions, a survey of chief financial officers suggests.

Eighty-seven percent of the 1,400 CFOs polled by Robert Half Finance and Accounting said that tenure with previous employers is an important factor when evaluating job candidates.

In the survey, CFOs were asked, "How important a factor is the length of time a job candidate has spent with previous employers when evaluating the applicant for a position with your company?" A total of 45 percent said that it is somewhat important, followed by very important (42 percent), and not important (10 percent).

Max Messmer, chairman and CEO of Robert Half International

and author of *Managing Your Career for Dummies* says that it's common for people to change jobs or careers multiple times during their lifetimes.

"But holding too many positions in rapid succession and without signs of professional advancement can be a red flag for employers," he adds. "Hiring managers place a high value on employee loyalty, in part because it is so difficult to replace top performers."

Messmer also notes that many job changes stem from a desire for greater challenge, which doesn't always require changing employers. He suggests employees look for opportunities within their



own companies first. "Supervisors usually are receptive to matching valued staff members with assignments that allow them to expand their skills and grow," he says.

MORE/ www.roberthalf.com

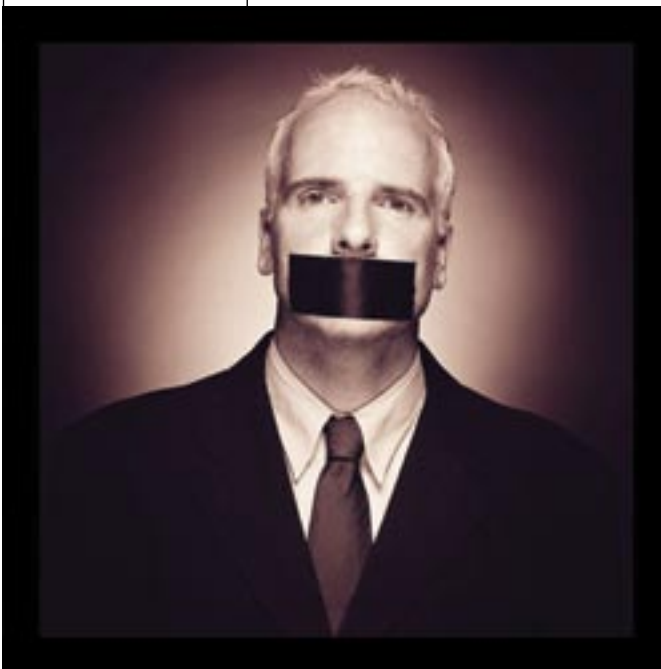
Managers and Executives: What Kind of Coaching Do You Prefer?

- Leadership development – 60%
- Communications skills – 48%
- Organizational and political savvy – 32%
- Job performance – 28%
- Business acumen – 27%
- Career planning – 26%
- Work-life balance – 22%
- Health and fitness – 7%



Source: CO2 Partners

// FAST FACT //



Source: VitalSmarts and The Concours Group

SILENCE FAILS

EIGHTY-FIVE PERCENT OF HIGH-STAKES BUSINESS INITIATIVES fail when executives avoid discussions about difficult issues, such as realistic deadlines and resources, inadequate sponsorship, and individual and team accountability.

// COOL TOOL //

Books On the Go

Books24x7 recently launched Books24x7 On the Go, a PDA-accessible website that provides access to Books24x7's collections via a BlackBerry, cell phone, or other mobile device.



The new On the Go version offers the same capabilities as the Books24x7 platform. Users can navigate and access the full-length content of

thousands of business and technical books. They also can browse the web and organize their personal and corporate folders.

One hook: On the Go content is free to current Books24x7 subscribers, but new subscribers will have to pay \$459 for the software.

MORE/ corporate.Books24x7.com.