



THURSDAY 19, NOVEMBER 2009

Why Kick-Off Meetings

WHY Business KICK-OFF meetings? Why anniversary celebrations? Why birthday parties? Why New Year's holidays? Really, why anything?

Exactly.... the day to day humdrum can definitely create the pedantic, and plodding day after day rhythm of life with no differentiation. It is all just a blur. I walk into the office; the phone rings; I answer; someone asks a question; I respond and so on and so forth, day after day, month after month and year after year.

Back to the question-Why Kick-off meetings? For one, it allows you to differentiate the day as a special time and the meeting, a special place. It also allows the entire organization to come together for a day or half day to kick off the year.

We've had kickoffs in an array of places. One year we were in a barn and another year at a swanky Chicago Hotel. Banquet facilities are my favorite: though the East Bank club is not bad.

For one of our clients, the kickoff is the highlight of their year. Every employee has to go up in front of everyone and answer some fun, preconceived questions. It is all very entertaining and a culture builder. This is especially true when big key employee, Marcos, with his bushy beard does "THE BIG PICTURE" behind the company's growth -It's the real story and told in the real way.

For 2010, a kick off meeting is absolutely critical. It will allow you to put 2009 behind you. It is one of the best uses of time and money. This is important for the organization to distinguish that there was indeed, a 2009 and for most organizations, it entailed salary cuts, layoffs and a sense that our survival was at risk. At the meeting, the past goes into the past.

How we typically do this is to put 2009 up on flip charts. The group answers questions about the



GROUPS WORK TOGETHER TO ESTABLISH GROUND RULES

Book Review

MASTERING THE ROCKEFELLER HABITS by VERNE HARNISH

As I reflected on how much I liked this book, I immediately began to include aspects of it into our planning process. There are definitely useful insights in this book. For one, it is a book about growing your company. That is a critical conversation for 2010. The author's one page plan and his planning techniques are also useful when used to align everyone to the organization's goals and direction.

Harnish has some unique ways of organizing this material. A lot of what the book covers are things that I have talked about with our clients. However, the author, to his credit, has written a book about it which to date, I have not. So a lot of this material, while it may not be new is being reinforced and illuminated in new and refreshing ways. There is a significant chapter on Values with some real tips on how to weave them into the fabric of the organization. According to the author, for the values to be relevant, they should be in the employee review process, hiring process and

year and puts these answers up on flipcharts in categories such as breakdowns, what was learned, breakthroughs, fiascos, disappointments, accomplishments and etc. What aspects of 2009 are we taking into 2010 and what aspects are we leaving behind are also flip charted. Then, in front of the room, spokespeople read from the flipcharts and there is a Q & A session from the audience. As a grand finale, participants stand up and say farewell to 2009 – tears flow, (not hugs) and the crowd then greets 2010 with cheers, handclapping, hurrahs and gales of laughter. Very emotional- NOT, but worthwhile and useful. Everyone is ready for the new year. Game 2010 on.

One of the great aspects of this exercise is that employees get to confront everything that happened during the past 12 months. It also brings completion to the year. One season is completed while the next season opens up.

The kick-off allows the leadership team to promote and layout the three to five year time horizon in broad brush strokes and to more precisely paint the picture of 2010. I subscribe to the idea that what determines how an organization operates in the present is dictated by the future that the organization lives into. The issue here is that most of us have the organizations past filed in the future file bin. Therefore, typically, what the organization is unknowingly doing is living into its past. I wonder if GM, Lehman Brothers or Chrysler has a perspective on this that they would like to share.

So the kick-off allows for a distinct future to get created by the leadership group and CEO. At this point, leadership stands and presents the company's future. Hopefully, this is not something that was created over coffee that morning. Our clients have been working and developing this future over the past two to three months. This is the culmination of a lot of work and some of the participants have also been a part of the planning.

At the kickoff meetings we facilitate , we typically annoy the group with stupid games and other growth and development activities. It is not all lecture and people are not sitting there like they are watching TV. There is also a lot you can do around these exercises and customer service and relationships. At one meeting, we rolled out a new set of values and led exercises that allowed people to experience the new values with each other.

At other kickoffs, leadership has laid out what it is

compensation philosophy.

Our clients reading the book have let me know that they like it and are using the various types of meetings and huddles that are outlined. The meetings are quick – under ten minutes and very to the point-great for groups setting the focus of the day. Harnish's design for an employee survey is also simplistically great. I found that his focus on employee feedback is easy to implement and I predict, would generate results.

Another positive characteristic about his approach is how accessible it is. It is on the website www.gazelles.com and ready to use. It is well done. At the end of every chapter is a synopsis with the key points. Heck, for the bookaphobes out there, you could just read this section and get value from the book.

I do not think the book does enough with illuminating and dealing with the inherent challenges that go with growing a business. There is not enough emphasis on research and really designing solutions. With that said, there are still lots of tips and techniques that will add life and energy to your planning process. Just designing a one page plan will be useful for most planning cycles.

Take what works for you and let us know what you think. We look forward to hearing your feedback and thoughts on the book.

TEAMBUILDING FOR THE NEW YEAR

As the seasons change, so do people and their work attitudes. Now is the time to get your groups together for a dynamic day of teambuilding. This session will help employees gain useful knowledge to develop and maintain a successful high performance team. This session will also get groups performing to their potential and making an impact on the company. Participants day to day activities will enhance and they will focus their behavior towards increasing and supporting teamwork.

going to take for everyone to go Las Vegas or Cancun complete with props and skits. In both cases, the companies did go to their respective locations as a celebration of their accomplishments. It all started at the kickoff meeting.

After the leadership presentation there is an opportunity for departmental planning to delineate how to improve and grow in order to deliver on the company's future. The departments get to look at their strengths and weaknesses and how they need to fix them.

We have great exercises for departments to give each other feedback on how they can improve their internal customer service. Whoever is facilitating should set up the ground rule that this is business, not personal. Everyone should embrace the idea of constant improvement as the bottom line. Then unresolved issues can be explored and clarified. In addition to strength and weakness feedback, the department will design 2010 objectives, action plans and first quarter milestones that support the overall organization's direction.

During the kickoff, new information can be given to the organization. If lean initiatives are going to be part of the year or a new ERP or other Software is being implemented, the kick off meeting is a perfect time to get started in training. Why not use the opportunity? We are all together for the day – lunch is included - the New Year has begun, let's go for it and make the whole kickoff wildly productive.

So there you have it. Now let's re-cap. Why kickoff meetings?

- A. They let you put the past in the past.
 - B. They let you create a future to live into.
 - C. They allow for Departmental Planning .
 - D. You can begin training and educational initiatives.
- All this along with stupid games and other fun annoyances.

Such a deal! So do it. Especially this year, because 2010 is not going to be anything like 2009. I promise and you can hold me to it.

The real question is will you and your organization be ready for the opportunities of the New Year?

Let us know how it goes. We would love to hear about your breakthroughs and progress.

All of our sessions are highly participative and interactive. Team members will walk away with a new understanding and apply what was learned to their performance back at the workplace.

Visit our website www.cmiteamwork.com to learn more about us and the programs we offer.

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Game 2010 On,

Bruce

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