

Traveling Light Newsletter

© Jennifer Selby Long, April 20, 2007

Welcome to the inaugural edition of Traveling Light, Selby Group's free monthly newsletter. Traveling Light© is a newsletter exploring how those blessed with the talent and opportunity to lead can be more effective and lighten the load inherent in their lives, based on the work of management consultant Jennifer Selby Long. Copyright 2007 Jennifer Selby Long. All rights reserved.

Quick tips for lightening your load

- If you're in a leadership role, you're probably in the top 20% of people in intellect, talent, and responsibility. Some people who work for you are your peers in all three areas. Some are not; they bring different gifts to the table. Unrealistic expectations about human beings create a heavy burden for you and for everyone who interacts with you. Free up some energy. Don't expect everyone to be motivated by what motivates you, as quick to learn, or ready, willing, and able to step into your role.
- Speaking of successors, who will replace you if you get hit by the proverbial Mack truck today? In 15 years of working directly with leaders, I can say that, with a few exceptions (such as early-stage start-ups), the best leaders seek out, hire, and develop at least one successor, if not two. The weakest leaders don't want the threat of a powerful underling. Be strong. Hire, support, and develop your successors well. If you never get hit by that Mack truck, it's a beautiful thing. If you do, your preparation will have lightened the load for you and your organization.
- While I'm on a roll here, did you know that an astounding number of management positions in the developed nations will be vacated by retiring baby boomers over the next 10 years? Leadership is not a part-time role, no matter how good you are. It's not a semi-retired consulting project, either, unless clearly defined as interim leadership. What are you doing to reach out to younger people with leadership potential? What are you doing to develop leaders from other countries?

Potentially disastrous leader's predicament of the month: The CEO volunteers you to lead the dreaded bogus Our Corporate Values project

Nothing holds less appeal for the typical leader than being assigned a vague internal project which feels more like putting your hand in a bowl of Jell-o than building a successful, thriving business. Short of failed mergers and acquisitions, there are few projects which so consistently waste time and breed cynicism in organizations today. No wonder you don't

want to touch it with a 10-foot pole.

Still, you can turn this dog of a project into a meaningful and pragmatic contribution (and do your career no harm, either) by following a few challenging, but ultimately simple, guidelines.

Before all else: get crystal clear on the business purpose of the project. Answer the question, "Why?"

Be prepared to introduce and completely guide the discussion. Amazingly, even the senior-most sponsors may not have really thought this through, in stark contrast to the thorough (and, of course, undeserved) whipping they gave your last budget proposal.

Why does this shared values project exist? What prompted the CEO's decision to inculcate a set of shared values throughout the organization? How will the business be improved if this project is a success? Is this value substantial enough to warrant our time and attention? What would happen to the business if you did nothing? What will happen to the business if you don't do this well or if you let it stall and lose momentum? Is this the right thing to do, or would we get greater value by focusing on something else?

Some common business reasons for creating shared values are:

- building a strong, clear brand with customers and prospective customers (essential in a service business where your people are your brand)
- building a strong, clear brand with current and prospective employees (the current buzz-phrase is "becoming the employer of choice")
- providing a roadmap for individual growth of each employee
- providing an ethical compass
- getting everyone on the same page with regard to key values and behaviors, which are important aspects of building or sustaining a particular organizational culture

On the other hand, if you really just want this assignment to go away, there's no faster way to kill it than to move forward without a business case. Unfortunately, you'll have to live with the political and career consequences of ruining the CEO's pet project. Darn it.

Second: set up a process that will integrate these shared values with the organization you really have, not the ideal organization you wish you had. Guiding values and other similar projects are already at risk of being encumbered by excessive idealism. Their only hope for success is to connect them to the sometimes messy, uneven reality of the living, breathing creature known as your company.

There are six keys to a successful culture change, all of which are necessary to make it real and keep it from becoming yet another dusty plaque on the wall that gets tossed in the

trash the next time you move your office. If you want yours to be successful, make sure all six are in place in your planning and execution:

1. Start with the customers' needs and wants
2. Directly support the unique business, its needs, and its strategy
3. Translate the values into actions that can routinely be observed, measured, and evaluated
4. Engage and involve the employees, including seeking out their criticisms
5. Integrate the values into systems that impact the employee, such as recruiting, hiring, career/leadership development, compensation, and performance management
6. Have a committed executive sponsor (or sponsors), not just HR

Likewise, look at the opposite end of the spectrum and you will see the factors that drive the downfall of these initiatives every time. Failed culture change initiatives were any or all of the following:

1. Based on a philosophical discussion or are a knee-jerk reaction to an unpleasant development
2. A copy of something that worked elsewhere
3. Too abstract to act on
4. Created and implemented entirely from the top
5. Living all alone in a document or on a plaque
6. An HR-sponsored initiative only

Set yourself and your team up for success by setting up the project right and closely monitoring these six attributes to keep it on track.

News

Are You a Wealthy Type? A New Study of Type, Gender, and Money.

I'm speaking at the International Association for Psychological Type July 15 in Baltimore. I hope to see you there. This conference will have plenty for professionals and type enthusiasts at every level.

I've gone off-topic from my usual fare to present the results of a study I recently conducted on the influences of gender and psychological type on financial behavior.

I became interested in the subject after noticing differences between many of my male and female clients in their relationship with money. What I learned in the study stunned me, and pointed to risk factors associated with certain aspects of an individual's psychological type. Awareness of the risk factors can help people make better choices.

If you will be at the conference, I hope to see you at my program. If you won't be there, please drop me a line and I will be happy to send you a copy of the study report.

A Blinding Flash of the Obvious

From time to time, something hits me out of the blue.

Recently, my husband and I decided to take advantage of free admission to San Francisco's Museum of Modern Art. My deep and meaningful reason: we had 30 minutes to kill before meeting our friend for dinner, and this beat sitting around sipping an overpriced designer cocktail.

After 30 minutes of seeing the exhibit Picasso and American Art, I felt like I was in a parallel universe, moved and inspired, but was embarrassed to realize I had no idea why, or what it was that I felt inspired to do. Management consultants analyze and optimize, well, just about everything, and this defied analysis and optimization.

The next morning I awoke utterly refreshed, nearly danced my way down the city streets to my office, bounded into my chair, and started writing up a storm.

It didn't matter that I couldn't analyze and assess what the artists inspired me to do. What mattered is that I was inspired by these men and women, original thinkers one and all, who stretched my brain and my emotions, triggering my desire to keep on stretching myself.

Life is too short to slog through. What inspires you? Go do it.