

Traveling Light Newsletter

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Welcome to the third edition of Traveling Light, Selby Group's free (almost) 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

- Hate your boss? A Florida State University study found that people with unsupportive bosses are twice as likely to feel sad and helpless, which doesn't strike me as the optimal state for productivity, creativity, great leadership, and whatever else we may need in our people on any given day. Those who built strong bonds with their coworkers offset some of the stress. Do I have to state the obvious implications for bosses? Too many of my clients say they want to be respected and they don't care if they're liked. All well and good, unless your behaviors are seen by your employees as unsupportive. Find out.
- Think you have to be as depressed as Sylvia Plath to be a creative genius? Luckily, no. One study after another has found that a generally positive work environment, free of interpersonal conflict, stokes the creative fires. I've seen this in organizations with which I've worked. Now I've come across a study from the University of Toronto, indicating that upbeat people produce more ideas and are better able to consider a range of solutions. Maybe Pollyanna was on to something.
- Need a little perspective after this week's market slide? Some long-term trivia to remind us that a week is just a week, not a lifetime: In 1907, the average work week for *all* people (not just harried professionals) was over 60 hours, only 6% of manufacturing workers took vacations, the average woman spent 12 hours a day on laundry, cooking, cleaning, and sewing. The economic improvements of the last 100 years have been substantial, to say the least. Even those over my lifetime have been impressive. I'm not going to lose any sleep this weekend over that little ol' growling bear.

Five Ways to Sabotage Your Acquisition

Actually, there are at least a dozen ways to sabotage an acquisition, but for the sake of brevity, and to stay focused on the areas in which I can speak from the most experience, let's explore five of them:

1. *Grossly underestimating what it will take to integrate people, processes, and systems.* I've seen few successful acquisitions of any size without a dedicated integration team. At a minimum, you need full-time, dedicated resources in IT, integration of different business models and processes, facilities, and change management, by which I mean how to get all of the people moving in the same direction, not the processing of change orders related to the acquisition process.
2. *Moving too slowly to reorganize the company.* Some people are going to lose their jobs. Better sooner than later. That's not as cold as it sounds. When you prolong confusing, duplicate, and overlapping roles, you increase cynicism, frustration, and the fear that the acquiring organization's leaders are inept, indecisive bureaucrats. This is often the most painful step for executives and managers alike, but it's better to move quickly than to keep confusion and fear hanging over everyone's heads. I particularly like the effectiveness of a reorganization that takes weeks, not months. It's so painful and exhausting for everyone involved (even me, and I'm just the outside consultant), but the results are worth it.

3. *Viewing “acquisition communication” as the stuff you announce to people about the acquisition.* Depending on its size, an acquisition can be a small change or an enormous one. The tendency is to make announcements and think you’re communicating. The most successful large-scale changes involve a two-way process, and it’s given the respect it deserves by being somewhat formalized and measured for its contribution to the success of the change. It’s certainly a lot more than saying to your managers, “So, how are your people doing? Be sure everyone announces the latest news at your next staff meeting.”
4. *Putting lipstick on a pig and telling people it’s beautiful.* Do not put a positive spin on obviously negative developments. Be honest, and share your plan to address the issues, or at least your timeline for pulling a plan together. Your people are living day-to-day with the consequences of these negative developments. They’re probably even the ones who brought the problems to your attention. You will kill your credibility, particularly among the employees of the acquired organization, who have no relationship with you, and therefore no particular reason to trust you in the first place.
5. *And from deep in our unconscious selves... Telling the employees of the acquired company how lucky they are now that they are part of your company.* Of course, these days no one is so crass as to literally say this out loud, but the fact that we don’t say it out loud in no way addresses the fact that we feel it, if that’s what we feel. Attitudes and emotions leak out all over the place. But reverse this attitude quickly, because if the undertone set by the acquiring company’s leadership is in *any way* superior, the employees of the acquired company will pick it up, along with their bags, as they head toward to door to your competitor. You’ll also lose out on all you could have learned from the employees who stay, because you’re demeaning their knowledge, skills, and expertise. I recall the time I found myself sitting in the regional sales office of an acquiring company. When the SVP of Sales announced the acquisition of a close competitor, the sales team cheered and yelled, “We win!” At that moment, let’s just say I knew I had my work cut out for me. The acquisition turned out to be a stunning success, in part because the SVP had the good sense to say, “Cut it out, you guys. Each of these people is part of our team now. We’re all in it together and frankly, I’ve seen their numbers and they’re every bit as good as you are.”

News

Congratulations to Selby Group Affiliate Sharon Richmond, who has recently accepted a part time position with the Stanford Graduate School of Business. Sharon, along with John Cronkite, is serving as a Leadership Coach. She will be directly involved in developing the leadership curriculum, coaching second-year Fellows who will be teaching first year students, and facilitating interpersonal dynamics courses.

Planning to travel to South Africa in September? Want to increase your EQ? Combine the two by attending Julie Brown’s talk at NexusEQ 2007, their sixth emotional intelligence world summit. For more information, visit: <http://www.sbs.co.za/nexusEQ2007/>.

A Blinding Flash of the Obvious

I have a giant concrete hole in the back of my yard. I couldn’t be happier.

The giant concrete hole used to be a charming pond. It was certainly charming when we toured an open house three years ago and decided we really had to buy this Craftsman cottage with its lovely lily pond. It was charming for the first few weeks when we would sit out in the back yard to watch butterflies and dragon flies flutter by. It was charming when little finches flocked to the burbling water fountain in the middle of the pond. It

was even charming to watch our cat lean forward like a lion at an oasis to lap up the water.

But it became less charming when mosquito larvae started spiraling around in it. The solution seemed simple enough -- mosquito fish from the Alameda County Mosquito Abatement Authority. But once the fish were in the pond, raccoons started coming into the yard every night and sloshing around in the pond, trying to eat the fish. I live in Oakland, and these are not your every day gentle country raccoons. These are city gang raccoons who live in the sewer under our street.

None of the raccoon-ridding solutions worked. Not the loud noise emitter. Not the water poisoner (which would have also poisoned the cat). Not the water squirter. Not the raccoon electrocutor (which would have also electrocuted the cat). Nothing. And the city of Oakland doesn't relocate raccoons unless they're hunting small children. They have bigger fish to fry.

Meanwhile, pond gunk from all the raccoon water-sloshing was clogging up the filter every 48 hours. We wondered what fool had originally installed an 18" deep pond, which is pretty much a guaranteed way to build up algae and more pond scum. We debated our options and pursued every avenue while the raccoons tore up the lily pads and half of our yard. In the end, the pond had to go.

But how hard would it be to drain an 18" deep pond? Couldn't be a big deal. So we scooped out the mosquito fish and moved them to the Berkeley creek (where they still happily reside). Then my husband began the draining process.

After two hours, we knew we were in trouble. In the absence of water, there was endless pond scum and dense, tangled six-inch thick water lily roots. When all was said and done, it turned out that our pond wasn't a foot and half deep. It was four and a half feet deep -- eighteen inches of water and three feet of tangled roots and reeking pond scum. Weeks later, the last of the dried pond scum has been scraped and hauled off, leaving a big, dry concrete hole, soon to be torn up, hauled away, and replaced with dirt. Nice, dry dirt that won't attract pond scum. And we've treated ourselves to massages.

Next time we tackle a home improvement project, I want it to be something non-stinky and effortless. When you tackle a stinky project (figuratively or, in our case, literally), for heaven's sake, please take a little time to reward yourself with something nice, and tackle something more pleasant, before diving in to the next one. On that note, I wish you a happy summer enjoying the abundant *good* things Mother Nature has provided.

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