

## **Traveling Light Newsletter**

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Welcome to the fourth 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**

- Recent conversations have reminded me how essential it is for leaders to dust off, revisit, and perpetually remind ourselves to tune in to others. Force yourself to listen by both summarizing what the other person has said and asking the individual if you've understood his or her key points. Our minds can't think as slowly as our mouths speak, so simply telling yourself, "I'll really pay attention now" is a little like telling yourself, "I'll really ride slowly on the roller coaster now." It will have no impact on the outcome. Bring your team along for the journey by raising your expectations of their listening as well. Genuine listening and dialogue take more time than shoving your ideas down each other's throats, but I think of it as an investment to achieve a sustainable solution instead of one that constantly unravels, is sabotaged, or simply fades away.
- If you want to make a change at work, try spending time with those who've already done it, or who are at least committed to similar goals. You'll be doing what participants in Weight Watchers International have been doing for years. A recent study reported in the *New England Journal of Medicine* indicated that our behaviors are largely influenced by our social networks. Hence, those who spend time each week at Weight Watchers with like-minded individuals are far more likely to make the changes they want than those who go it alone or enroll in programs that don't involve routine contact with other people who share their goals. While the study focused on weight, it's not a big leap to see how this influences other aspects of our lives, particularly for us externally-focused Extraverts.
- Stressed out by the afternoon? Don't think too deeply about this if your lunch consists of a sandwich and some fries. I've had clients come to me with concerns about their waning enthusiasm and commitment to work who essentially were just eating a lousy lunch and then suffering the aftereffects every day. The 25-year-old body can usually handle the sandwich and fries and keep on going. The 45-year-old body generally can't. I'm waiting for someone to invent a low-carb French fry so I can live by my own advice here. Until then – sigh -- I'll keep relegating the fries mostly to the weekends.

### **Now I See You, Now I Don't: Navigating the Tricky Waters of a Global Team**

Virtual teaming has been on radar screen a lot lately. It was a hot topic at a recent management consulting conference I attended, and it popped up in the Wall Street Journal a few weeks later. I'm feeling a little like an avatar myself these days -- I lead a virtual team, participate on virtual teams, and advise on virtual teams, often having little or no personal contact with the other members.

Virtual teaming has its own challenges, and they grow bigger when the team is truly global and no matter what time you meet, one location is in their pajamas.

To my fellow leaders of virtual teams, I salute you and offer this advice, culled from my own experience and discussions with people who are in the same boat, either as leaders of, advisors to, or members of virtual teams.

The easiest mistake to make is to assume that building this group of individuals into a high-functioning team will take twice as much effort as it took to build your co-located team. Try *four or five times as much effort*, particularly if the team is global. Plan accordingly.

When team members are far away, everything dysfunctional is amplified once the honeymoon is over. When something goes wrong, we're far more likely to assume that the people in another location are at fault, incompetent, not pulling their weight, mean-spirited, selfish, back-stabbing, and on and on.

In these moments, of course, we're fully convinced of how reasonable, competent, perfectly honest, and apolitical we and our local team members are. That's why it helps to get an outside perspective, from someone other than your spouse, on what's going on and how you might be unwittingly contributing to the problem.

That's also why it's essential to do whatever you can to help the team members be with one another in person or at least feel like they are. Here are some techniques that have worked:

- Bring the team together in person *at least twice a year*. If the team is huge, at least bring the leaders together twice a year.
- Use a technology that allows you to *see* one another. The crème de la crème would be Cisco's new TelePresence technology, which produces an incredible live meeting experience, and is just plain cool, but will set you back about \$300,000. Check it out here: [http://www.cisco.com/application/pdf/en/us/guest/products/ps7073/c1031/cdccont\\_0900aecd8054c7bd.pdf](http://www.cisco.com/application/pdf/en/us/guest/products/ps7073/c1031/cdccont_0900aecd8054c7bd.pdf). Other options range from webcams and videoconferencing systems to my personal favorite -- a team found themselves with only one virtual member who was chronically forgotten and left out, so they put a web cam and dedicated screen in each location so everyone could see each other at work. Whenever he wanted to talk to someone or vice versa, it was as simple as turning to the screen and saying, "Hey, got a minute?" A dirt cheap solution for a relatively simple but important challenge.
- Add a personal aspect to your meetings and web space. One team opened their early meetings with a "getting to know you" time. This naturally morphed into a personal space (nicknamed "Our Virtual Water Cooler") on their shared site in which one member posted pictures of her new puppy, another shared photos of his remodeled basement, and a third shared pix from a recent vacation. The goodwill and humanity that was built was of great help during bumpy times.

More tips:

- Involve the team members in "offshore" locations in some of the more interesting work that's typically reserved for US, Australian, and European offices. Those of you who have call centers in India and programmers doing nothing but legacy systems maintenance in suburban Shanghai have access to a talent pool that is intellectually outgrowing the typical offshore responsibilities and may be eager to take on more. One of my clients tells me he has been doing this for a while now. He's highly respected for the results he gets, and he has yet to face political resistance for making the offshore/onshore boundaries fuzzy.
- I hate to keep pushing my clients' products, but if you're not using an inexpensive technology like Webex for meetings that involve documents, you're missing out on an opportunity to maximize shared understanding and minimize the errors and pointless arguments that come from only talking with one another instead of sharing real-time documents.
- When in doubt, first assume your non-local counterparts are both competent and honest. Assume the best and enter the conversation from a mutual problem-solving perspective. Insist that your team do the same.

- *Most importantly, whatever you want them to do, also do it yourself.* If you include “getting to know you” time in your early meetings, but all you share are your career highlights, there’s little hope anyone will know you better, extend more goodwill your way, or open up so others get to know them. Likewise, post your own pictures at the virtual water cooler and others will follow suit.

### **A Blinding Flash of the Obvious**

I live in one of the most popular vacation destinations in the world. This was never clearer than last month, when thousands of Europeans, enjoying the benefits of a strong Euro, visited San Francisco, and spent time on Union Square and Market Street, where my office is located.

Every day as I walked down the sidewalk, I was surrounded by the sound of relaxed tourists, enjoying the very things I used to enjoy when I first moved here 14 years ago. My mind drifted to wine country, the spectacular coastal scenery of Mendocino County, hikes in the redwoods, the Monterey Aquarium, and hours spent just hanging out in San Francisco, sipping espresso and visiting museums and Golden Gate Park.

“Ah, those were the days!” I wistfully mused. I admit I even felt a twinge of envy, thinking, “I wish I could do all that again.” Suddenly it hit me like a ton a bricks. I can. I *live* here, for Pete’s sake. I don’t have to fly anywhere, dutifully carrying my 2.5 ounce bottles of shampoo and toothpaste through the security checkpoint. I don’t have to rent a car that smells vaguely of stale cigarette smoke, even though it’s marked *non-smoking*. I don’t have to stay in a hotel.

Kirk and I decided to stay home and vacation like we don’t live here. We’ll take a leisurely drive through Mendocino and wine country, staying wherever we want. We’ll do all our favorite San Francisco activities, without rushing to get back to the office, and we’ll probably be the only two adults attending the Monterey Aquarium without children.

I can’t wait. I haven’t been so excited about a vacation since I took my last Bay Area vacation from the equally excellent city of Chicago 15 years ago.

Besides, we can’t handle the stress of more airline travel at the moment. Now that the giant concrete hole is gone from my back yard, filled with dirt and covered in mulch, the cat has turned it into a gigantic litter box right in the middle of the yard. It’s already attracted a swarm of flies. No grass is filling in because the irrigation system doesn’t cover the former pond area. We need to rest up for the next round of horticultural problem solving.

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