

# The International communicator

communicating with competence

Winter 2006

## From the Editor

Dear Readers,

Effective IT is not just about technology itself but about learning how to use that technology to benefit from the information it provides (p. 2). Leveraging information also means embracing new ways of working with it, such as in hybrid teams (p. 2), and skillfully employing tools for facilitating communication, such as conference calls (p. 3).

Turning your interaction with your boss into a mutual learning experience (see right), changing (corporate) cultural thought patterns (p. 3) and reviewing your attitude to the selling situation (p. 4) will also result in more effective communication.

You have to *learn* how to do all of these things. Only those companies will succeed that provide an environment that fosters learning.

N Vision's business is to work together with companies to help them do just that—foster learning.

Joe Butler, Editor

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## Leadership

### Coaching the Boss

*It is not always easy to tell your boss what you think. Try making your interaction a mutual learning experience.*

*"Leadership and learning are indispensable to each other."*

—John F. Kennedy

*"The ability to learn is a defining characteristic of being human; the ability to continue learning is an essential skill of leadership"*

—Warren Bennis

The notion of being helped by somebody else evokes, for many, a negative reaction. "It is not right to be helped." "I must do it myself." When we do feel OK about being helped, it is usually because the source of help has been labeled a professional authority, for example, teacher, sports coach, trainer, accountant and so on.

**"Rather than associating 'coaching the boss' with authority, reframe it as mutual learning."**

So what can you do if you are offering help and the recipient is your boss?

Matrix structures, 360° feedback and performance reviews have been designed to encourage initiative and to give people the freedom to be more responsive.

- ① Begin by emphasizing that you can learn from each other
- ② Ask your boss how you can help their performance
- ③ Ask whether your boss would like to hear how you think you can help their performance
- ④ Give your observations, feelings, feedback and requests for change
- ⑤ Listen, discuss, conclude and summarize
- ⑥ Agree to make your session a regular dialog

Unfortunately, they still carry the stigma of traditional authority. This inhibits upward feedback.

The effectiveness of any coaching lies in direct and constructive feedback. Rather than associating "coaching the boss" with authority, **reframe** it as mutual learning.

The steps above may help you create the dialog necessary for mutual learning with your boss. To begin, use the performance review situation as your forum.

Follow these steps and, hey, presto! You have done a piece of coaching—with your boss.

*Ed Norman*

## Great Teams Talk

*Is your team virtual or co-located or both: a hybrid team?*

The concept of the **virtual team** has become very popular in recent years. Teams that operate outside of traditional organizational structures, with dotted reporting lines and team members located

**“Distinctions between the traditional co-located team and the virtual team are becoming increasingly blurred.”**

across the world and in different time zones are becoming the norm in modern global companies.

I work in a traditional **co-located team**. We share an office here in Munich, can meet face-to-face whenever we want to and are able to rely on informal communication to stay connected on important team issues. Surely there is nothing we can learn from how virtual teams work?

This is simply not true.

I hardly see my colleagues. If I am not traveling, they are. A significant amount of our internal

communication is carried out via e-mail. More often than not, I catch up with people by telephone and when we do need to speak together as a team, we schedule a conference call or arrange to meet in a Munich hotel for a couple of days.

When I think about it, the distinctions between the traditional co-located team and the virtual team are becoming increasingly blurred. Many of us are operating in teams that are neither one nor the other: the **hybrid team**.

I believe we can all learn a lot by adopting some best practices from some of the virtual teams that I have been fortunate enough to learn with in the past five years.

- ▶ First, we all need to clarify the expectations of key stakeholders, define the goal(s) of the team and agree on key priorities. This means we can all stay focused even when there is limited regular contact.
- ▶ Second, we should all exchange our expectations as team members, manage our differences constructively and agree on team standards of excellence. This means that potential conflicts in the team can be identified and dealt with quickly and effectively.
- ▶ Third, and perhaps most importantly, we need to schedule regular events (virtual or face-to-face) for informal discussions, feedback and relationship-building. This creates a trusting and energizing environment and supports our team collaboration.

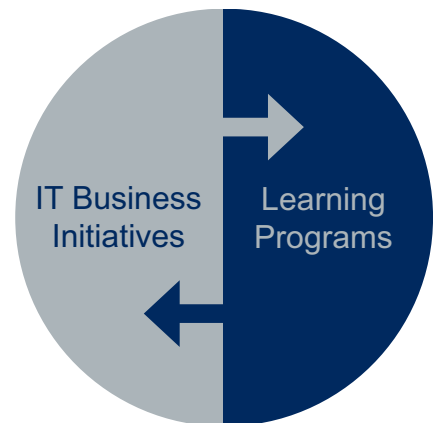
Great teams talk. And that's the bottom line.

*Mike Cook*

## IT Learning

*Helping IT learn to competitively serve their customers is one of N Vision's key objectives in business-driven action learning programs for global IT organizations.*

In recent years the IT industry seems to have run out of steam. Information technology—with the emphasis here on *technology*—is no longer seen as the key driving force behind business. In his book *Does IT Matter?* Nicholas G. Carr<sup>1</sup> sent a shockwave through the industry by declaring that IT had become nothing more than a mere



“utility.” Today companies are faced with Carr’s existential question: Does technology matter any more?

It is not that clients do not want technological innovation. It’s that their focus is centered on the information they are working with and the reliability of the systems and applications that support them while working with that information.

Because the customer’s emphasis is more on the information than on the technology itself, it is

*continued at*  
[www.nvision-learning.com/ic/articles](http://www.nvision-learning.com/ic/articles)

<sup>1</sup>*Does IT Matter? Information Technology and the Corrosion of Competitive Advantage*, Harvard Business School Press (April 1, 2004), ISBN: 1591394449.

## Food for Thought

“What this power is, I cannot say. All I know is that it exists...and it becomes available only when you are in that state of mind in which you know EXACTLY what you want...and are fully determined not to quit until you get it.”

—Alexander Graham Bell,  
US (British-born) inventor of  
the telephone (1847-1922)

## The Learning Corner

## Word Watch

### Ten Tips for Effective Conference Calls

Meet the greater communication challenges of conference calls.

Communication across cultures in business meetings is challenging at the best of times. Cultural differences, language competency, hidden agendas and time pressures are only a few of the aspects that

can lead to misunderstandings and frustrating results. In conference calls the challenges multiply. To deal with them, here are N Vision's ten top tips for effective conference calls.

#### N Vision's Ten Top Tips for Conference Calling

- ① A chairperson for every conference call:
  - Controls the process and ensures that the purpose is clear, items are discussed, action points stated, time frames kept.
  - Rotates tasks to keep political issues at a minimum
- ② Have clear objectives and invite the right people:
  - What are the outcomes I want to have when the call is over?
  - Who should be involved and what are their roles?
- ③ Create a workable agenda:
  - Include the exact date and time.
  - List participants and those who can't attend.
  - List and number the items including:
    - How long each discussion will take,
    - Who will present that issue and
    - What documents are needed for reference.
  - Send the agenda, instructions on logging-in and reference documents to the participants at least 24 hours in advance.
- ④ Appoint a time keeper and minutes taker:
  - Ask someone to keep time—and to signal when discussions are near to their time limit.
  - The person taking the minutes should send out the action points and minutes as a follow-up (as required).
- ⑤ Create a positive atmosphere:
  - Greet arrivals as they come in.
  - Do a short roll call of who is present and introduce new people.
- ⑥ Agree upon conference call etiquette:
  - Have people state their name before talking.
  - Remind native speakers to speak slowly, using simple, clear language.
- ⑦ Be an effective communicator
- ⑧ Control the discussion:
  - Interrupt long-winded speakers (even your boss).
- ⑨ Schedule the next conference call and follow up on action points.
- ⑩ Review every single conference call
  - Ask each participant these two questions:
    - How effective was the call? (task orientation)
    - How energizing was the call? (people orientation)

If your conference calls are not up to par, consider sharing these

tips and making the best out of those valuable 90 minutes of time.

[Ieva Gaidulis](#)

### Culture

The word *culture* is rooted in Latin *cultus*, past participle of *colere*, "to till the soil." *Culture* has different meanings in English. Geert Hofstede, founder of the Institute for Research on Intercultural Cooperation (IRIC) in the Netherlands, discusses two of them in his work and calls them simply *Culture One* and *Culture Two*.

**"We help cultural entities identify acquired mental programming patterns"**

*Culture One* refers to the refinement of the mind resulting in education, art and literature.

*Culture Two* is concerned with the acquired mental programming patterns that are so influential on our thinking, feeling and actions.

It is this *Culture Two* or "mental software," as Hofstede puts it, that is the focus of N Vision's work in the areas of leadership, teams, and intercultural communication. We help cultural entities, whether individuals or groups, identify these acquired mental programming patterns and support evaluation and intervention aimed at unlearning the limiting, obstructive or even destructive behaviors caused by such patterns.

We want our learning partners to reap the rewards of the soil they have tilled.

[Kieran McVey](#)

#### Top Learning Locations

For N Vision's top learning locations in 2005 visit [www.nvision-learning.com/learninglocations.html](http://www.nvision-learning.com/learninglocations.html).



## The Secret to Successful Selling

*The secret to successful selling lies in mastering the non-material reality of the selling situation.*

In the past 12 months I have personally witnessed half a dozen examples of selling teams that were unsuccessful. Their lack of success was not the result of substandard products or lack of selling skills but came about because key players on both sides of the sale were unable to recognize, admit to, and deal with their specific emotions of fear, uncertainty and distrust—"emotional viruses."

In "The Key to Key Account Management" (*International Communicator*, Autumn 2005) I wrote that key account management really translates into key player management. I'd like to share in more detail what I mean by that. Let me call this the "secret to successful selling by mastering the non-material reality between you (the selling team) and your customers (the buying team)."

In every human situation, someone is buying and someone is selling. So imagine some of your past selling situations. Can you remember a time after a sales meeting in which:

- ▶ You thought there wasn't enough important information for you to be able to give constructive support?
- ▶ You had the impression that power games had caused emotional disturbances and project disruptions?
- ▶ You felt de-energized and disrespected?

If you are a sales professional, your immediate response is—"Hey, Dan, wake up, that's the name

of the game in sales. It's a tricky business and we are each trying to outfox each other."

The problem with all of this foxy sales exchange is that nobody really profits in a big way. In fact, both seller and buyer fail to create the climate of trust that leads to optimal business results.

**"In every human situation, someone is buying and someone is selling"**

The symptoms mentioned above commonly occur when people manage their partnership only via "hard facts" or the material reality (see "Mental Mergers®," *International Communicator*, Summer 2004).

The "non-material reality" (soft facts) such as hopes, fears, states of mind, affinity between key players and management styles and

What challenging situation would you like us to deal with in a future issue of the

*International Communicator*?

Get our perspective.

Send us an e-mail at:

[communicator@nvision-learning.com](mailto:communicator@nvision-learning.com).

We will of course ensure that your challenging situation remains anonymous.

politics of the buyer and seller group are now unanimously considered at least as important as the hard facts.

When key selling and buying groups master and align their non-material realities, they experience a common sense of confidence, a positive spirit based on mutual respect and the acceptance of the positive way of managing their interpersonal relations.

If you feel your top sales teams could improve on "mastering the non-material realities of sales environments," please feel free to contact me.

*Dan Norenberg*

\*Mental Mergers® is a registered trademark of JPB Consulting.



## Numbers

**That's how many people are multitasking when on a conference call.**

Multitasking activities range from predictable-searching for documents or computer files-to the surprising-shopping online, getting dressed and even going to the bathroom!

90%

A recent survey of 375 people by Raindance Communications Inc. shows that there is still some way to go before people focus fully on the issues at hand.