

Tools for Success III: CGS

One of the hardest parts of starting in a new direction is **trying to get a picture of what that new direction might look like.**

Innovation is a seed.

Success is growing that seed until you can harvest some great new fruits.

Training is not a good gardening technique. Performance is better. The next few chapters give some gardening tips.

Tip #1 - When you want to encourage innovation to grow, don't reach first for training. Reach for CGS. Coaching - Group Think - Sharing Information.

Coaching:

I'm not athletic...never have been. However, during the years I was working on my dissertation, I realized I had passed a certain milestone. At some age, gravity starts taking command of a body. The hair from my head was sinking to my ears and shoulders, and the muscles in my arms and chest were in the process of moving to my stomach and below. I realized that it was time to do something about it, but afraid of hurting myself, I signed up to be coached by a personal trainer. While afraid of being confronted with a steroid pumped Neanderthal, I knew I needed help. I was blessed with Jay, one of the most insightful learners and teachers I have ever met.

I thought we would work together for a few weeks. Three years later, we stopped only because I left town to take a position at the University of Hartford.

Every week we learned something new...about how the body worked, about how we learned, about how to move from where I was to a better place. The first time I got an inkling of the **universal nature** of what Jay was teaching was when I was working on a chest press machine (imagine sitting and pushing a bar - like rowing in reverse).

He stopped me, pointing out that I had shifted my position so that one arm was forward...I was wrestling the weight first to one side and then the other. This was **obviously an inefficient way** to push against the weight.

I HAD been doing it a better way (with his guidance) just a second before. What happened? He said, **“When you get tired, you go back to the way your body is USED to working, even if that is less efficient.”** I was amazed. Then it occurred to me - **how often do organizations behave in just the same way?** They start a new initiative, but they get tired, or stressed, and slip back into the old way of doing things, **even when they have a better way.**

Coaching is a tool of unequaled power. It is

particularly **important at the beginning of a new adventure**, but it also can be used for continual improvement.

The power of coaching is that it **provides another perspective on your performance.** In addition, it gives you feedback on your self-monitoring skills. Often I was lifting away and feeling like a super jock, only to have Jay point out that I was holding myself in an awkward position. **If our self monitoring is off, then we will go full speed ahead in the wrong direction.**

Coaching is useful for the coach, too. As we worked together, Jay became interested in instructional design and learning science. He became more articulate in what he was doing and was able to develop a model that explores what he is doing when he develops training. It turns out his big difference is that he looks at the body as an entire system. **Instead of focusing on a muscle at a time, he looks at how all the muscles work together and how to improve the entire system.**

Hmmm.. can you see parallels in your work?

Coaching is a way to pay for what you want.

Identify experts within your organization, and **match them with people who want to improve.** Pay them and reward them for the time spent. **Coach during performance** - you can't discuss a lift or any other activity without doing it and getting feedback during and

right before or after. **Coaching is rooted in the activity.** Coaching should be **ongoing to be effective.** We are always learning new things and this is an excellent way to pass them on. **It helps both parties focus on improving their performance.** Occasionally bring in an outside coach to help guide the process during a project. Don't waste your time with a training course. **Pay for coaching to SHOW how to improve the process and performance over time.**

Group Thinking:

We've talked a bit about communities of practice and communities of purpose. Read Lave and Wenger book on situated cognition and Wenger's book on Communities of Practice.

The problem with communities of practice (COP) is when somebody gets a *fabulous* idea and thinks they can create a COP by fiat, "I decree you are now a COP, go forth and teach each other." **Meatball don't work dat way.**

Communities form on their own. They have to! You can't make them happen any more than you can make someone love you.

What you can and should do is encourage them

to form and grow and provide time and resources for community activities.

For example, professional organizations are often the first to go when belts are tightened. However, by getting together with other professionals who share interests in a social setting, highly valuable exchanges of information can happen. **Allow and support the formation of groups within the organization.** Communities share interests and experiences. **You must allow this to happen.** In a later chapter, I talk of brown bag lunches as an effective training tool...a tool for spreading the AHA.

What about meetings? Carl Weick, the organizational psychologist, writes of Sensemaking - the process of making sense of inputs that are new or different and the value of group Sensemaking (which can be what happens in a meeting). There are many guides to making meetings work. However, as we spend so much wasted time in meetings, I offer a few ideas.

- **Make a clear set of goals ahead of time.** Clearly define what must be decided and keep it short. **Get these goals to all participants ahead of time.** Don't allow "bright ideas" of the moment to side track you. A good way to deal with this is to make those who come up with "bright ideas" that result in more work do the work. "That's a great idea. Why don't you do it and report back."

Particularly watch the last few minutes before a decision. For some reason, this is a time when time wasting good ideas sprout forth.

□ **Aim for short meetings.** Adjourn once goals have been reached. Like an empty desk, which attracts new things to fill it, meetings scheduled to last an hour seem to find things to fill it. **Use reaching goals as a carrot if we finish early, we finish early. Start on time and end early.**

□ **Encourage argument ending in agreement or at least understanding.** Contentious meetings are a good thing. One of the ideas in sensemaking is that **while we argue, we are forming a group picture...making group sense.**

By arguing over a point, we are **often bringing different internal pictures of the same situation together.** Even if agreement is not reached, a shared understanding should emerge. The way to get the benefit is to **make this explicit.**

Argue to understanding should be your goal.

□ **Summarize after discussions, to make sure that the group sense is clear.** “So, what I hear you say...” should be a well used phrase throughout a meeting and at the end. Shared understanding is more important than agreement.

□ **Build an environment where phones, text messaging, emailing, and other activities are not acceptable during the meetings.** Promise to keep meetings short and on topic if they give the meeting attention. If they revert, check to see if you have returned to old boring meeting behavior.

Sharing Information:

A lot of this book focuses on how to share information. **Sharing information is a key to success in the information age.** Developing opportunities for people in your organization to share information both within the organization and with other professionals is crucial to success.

DOPSS systems are an essential internal means of sharing.

Establishing a climate of talking and exchanging ideas within the organization is essential. The only way to know what you know is to encourage people to talk about what they do, both formally and informally.

One of the most productive places on earth for developing essential, revolutionary new ideas, products and technologies was the Xerox Palo Alto Research Center. One of the wonderful things they did was **regularly present their work and findings to each other**

and to invite people in to both see what they were working on and to share ideas from the outside. **This communication was fundamental to their success.**

Business travel is often viewed as an unnecessary expense. That is correct if you think that **the only thing transferred is information.** However, **that is absurd!**

Some of my most important realizations have been the result of a passing conversation at a conference or a comment in a restaurant. If knowledge and learning is the interaction in time with people and information, it is extraordinarily valuable to **encourage situations where people can come together to see each other and talk when information can be exchanged.**

The connections made from this type of sharing can be **reap benefits for years to come.**

An engineer knew someone from a workshop years ago. He got a call one day. “This board has been moved from the 'send to be fixed' list to the 'just throw it away' list. I have three of them. I know they are expensive. Should I really throw them away?” **The change was a typo. The boards were worth \$10,000 each.**

How much is such a relationship worth?

How much did it cost to bring people together?

Indeed, this bringing together is one of the only valuable and long lasting products of “boot camp” type trainings. **As much or more could be achieved by inverting the time spent on learning and socializing.** spend most of the time having fun together and a few hours learning specifics (which will be soon forgotten.)

Good gardening lets knowledge bloom. Knowledge is driven by people interacting with each other and information.

If you want a successful garden in the information thicket you must:

- 1) get people together from time to time
- 2) build tools to allow virtual meetings and
- 3) build the tools that allow other denizens of the information thicket to constantly **share information easily.**

