



Collaborations

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Driving a car with right hand drive is a bit like working in a new, unfamiliar corporate culture.

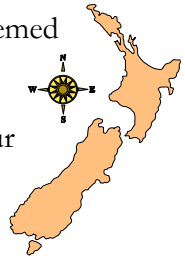
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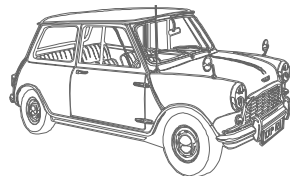
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Leadership Lessons from "Down Under"

I (Susan) recently traveled to New Zealand on vacation with my husband, Dave. While there, we found several situations which seemed to provide vehicles for lessons about leadership. Two of the situations literally included vehicles -- a tandem bicycle and a car. See page 3 for the tandem bicycle story. Read on to learn about our experience with "right-hand drive."



Driving a car with right hand drive is a bit like working in a new, unfamiliar corporate culture. It seems like we should be able to do it, but it's different enough that mistakes are easy to make.

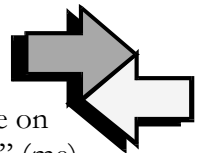


Dave has been driving for about 40 years. One would expect that he can drive almost without thinking about it. Normally that would be true, but with right-hand drive the rules are different. The first challenge Dave encountered is that some controls are in different places.

For example, for the first day or two, each time he used the turn signal, he actually turned on the windshield wipers. While our friends and I were sympathetic about the challenge Dave was facing, we couldn't help but laugh as he shut off the wipers and found the turn signal.

I think the analogy works well here. When a person starts working for a new company, he and others assume he knows the basics about how to accomplish things. In fact, some things might actually be done quite differently. Examples might include things such as how to run meetings, protocol for approvals, the use of e-mail, etc. And, if it's something visible, like the turn signal, the mistake can be known to everyone. This is not a great way to get started in a new job.

The second challenge Dave faced driving in New Zealand is that cars drive on the left-hand side of the road. This isn't too difficult except when you want to turn. We got some good advice on this aspect of driving in NZ. It was suggested that the "navigator" (me) tell the driver to turn "over right" and "sharp left" as a way to help the driver turn into the correct lane. Dave found it very helpful and it engaged me in ensuring his success in driving.



In the workplace, how often could we give some simple advice and then good coaching to help others as they transition to doing something new or something in a new way? When you have new people in your organization, consider providing a mentor or a "buddy" to help them integrate quickly and easily!

Common Problems at Work—Systems Thinking

Question: You mentioned “systems” problems as among the common problems you see as you work with various companies. What did you mean by “systems” problems?

Collaborations Response:

In our last issue, we discussed common organizational and personal issues that we see in our work with various companies. Most frequently organizational issues such as poor communications, lack of trust, lack of clarity in expectations and direction, are really symptoms of deeper problems. We suggested that these deeper problems are often “systems” problems.

To explore this further, let’s back up for a moment. We are typically very comfortable with, and trained in, linear thinking and linear problem solving. Linear thinking is a quite natural progression from A to B to C, etc. Linear problem solving consists of identifying the problem, listing possible solutions, choosing the best solution, implementing it and moving on. This serves us well in many situations, particularly when problems are clear, not complex and involve a low level of conflict.

However, as our organizations, and hence our problems, become larger and more complex, linear thinking and linear problem solving do not serve us nearly as well. We need to shift to systems thinking. Systems thinking allows us to consider our organizations as complex organisms in which each part interacts with the whole and also with each other part. Systems have a purpose. Systems seek equilibrium; therefore they resist change. Systems have feedback and, when healthy, the system responds to that feedback. We begin to see that behavior within a system is the result of many interconnections.

In thinking of the progression from A to B to C, systems thinking would alert us to take into consideration the impact of B back on A, and of C back on A and B etc. Our problem solving would cause us to ask, “what might be the unintended consequences of implementing a particular solution, and what might be the impact of that solution on other parts of our organization?”

Some examples: Our bodies are systems in which each part interacts with the other and also with the whole. A doctor who approaches our ailments in a linear fashion analyzes our symptoms and prescribes appropriate medication. In a systems approach, the doctor would also inquire about eating and exercising patterns as well as our emotional and psychological well being.

Typically, if a church were falling behind financially, the linear approach to the problem would be to have several more sermons on giving, send letters to all members explaining the situation and asking for additional giving, scheduling a moment for stewardship during the Sunday

morning services, etc. Systems thinking would cause us to ask questions about the spiritual growth of our members, their satisfaction with our programs, their overall spiritual health and commitment.

Systems thinking about poor communications in our organizations would lead us to look at the structures and processes we have in place. Frequently these make it very difficult for people to communicate. One example of this is when employees are not empowered to solve problems between groups at their own levels but rather must first go up and then down the organizational structure.

Systems thinking about teamwork would cause us to think about opportunities for teamwork. Lack of teamwork cannot be solved unless we build structures and processes that put people together so they can work together. If people are isolated or our structures prevent them from working together we cannot reasonably expect much in the way of teamwork. Systems thinking would also cause us to think about the amount of importance our organization places on teamwork, whether teamwork is a high value. Is teamwork rewarded? Or do we only reward individual performance? Is there a clear, valid expectation for teamwork?

A picture: If we were to try to present a visual representation of this discussion we would ask you to visualize an iceberg. The tip of the iceberg represents the “issues, challenges, opportunities, and problems” our organizations face. The immediate layer below the surface represents “recurring patterns of behavior” which are driven by the very bottom of the iceberg which are the “underlying structures and processes” which we have in place.

Thus the underlying structures and processes drive, or at least give rise to, the recurring patterns of behaviors that determine how our organizations approach the issues, challenges and problems we face.

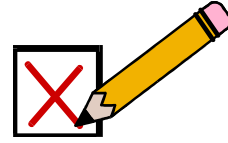
A temptation: In the face of complex problems where we can’t quite identify the exact issue - where the solution or even the options are unclear - our tendency can be to ask, “What’s wrong?” When we can’t nail down the answer, we often begin a search for “Who’s wrong?” Then we place “the blame!” Systems thinking will often be very helpful in complex situations, and will help us to solve complex problems rather than blaming our people.

So, when presented with a problem, take time to consider it from a systems point of view! You have a much better chance of solving the right problem and coming up with a solution that will stick!

Leadership Assessment ~ Business Focus

We have defined leadership in 4 key areas:

- Relationship
- Environment
- Processes
- Business Focus



In the last issue of Collaborations, we shared the Processes portion of our assessment with you. This issue finishes the assessment with Business Focus. If you would like printed copies of the entire assessment, send an e-mail to sgerke@att.net. Here's the Business Focus portion of the assessment:

1 = I could use work in this area 2= I do OK in this area 3= I could help others in this area

As a Leader, I:

1. _____ Understand and support the organization mission/strategy.
2. _____ Clearly communicate the organization mission/strategy to my followers.
3. _____ Produce results which align with the organization mission/strategy.
4. _____ Model the behaviors (daily) which support/illustrate the organization values

People need to feel connected to the organization. Helping them understand the mission/strategy and how they impact it can be a critical part of your job. And don't forget, you are always a model for your people. Be sure you are modeling the right behaviors.

Leadership Lessons from “Down Under” ~ Tandem Teamwork

Dave and I had never ridden a tandem bicycle, but decided it would be a fun way to do some wine tasting while in New Zealand. Dave is a very accomplished bike rider -- I ride a bicycle about once every 5 years, so Dave rode in front. It became clear from the first moment that we needed to figure out our roles and that teamwork was going to be critical to our success. Dave had control over the steering, braking, and gear changing.



Also, he could see what was ahead, while I couldn't. Dave's role was clearly that of leader. He had the “line of sight” on the goal and he had the ability to determine and change our direction and speed.

Being the follower turned out to be an important role too. In addition to pedaling, I had information that Dave needed. I could see the traffic that was behind us and alert him if needed. I also needed to give him feedback. I let him know if the speed was too fast or slow for me so he could adjust and get optimum pedaling performance from me. I also shared problems I was having when he changed gears. Together we adjusted how we communicated about the gear changing so that I didn't get whacked on the leg with the pedals each time. We also worked together on how we got the bike started each time. He couldn't see how difficult it was for me to start on my left foot. With my input, he adjusted so we started on the right foot every time. We both encouraged each other along the way as we mastered different aspects of the riding.

The lessons? They are the same ones we need to pay attention to in the workplace. On teams, different roles need to be played and it's important to discuss them and clarify them. For followers to be actively engaged, the leader has to provide information about what's happening and give regular encouragement. And, for team success, the follower has to provide useful feedback to the leader.

I'm not sure everyone on the tandems that day were as successful as Dave and I were. By clarifying our roles and providing lots of feedback and encouragement, we accomplished our goal and had a great time doing it!



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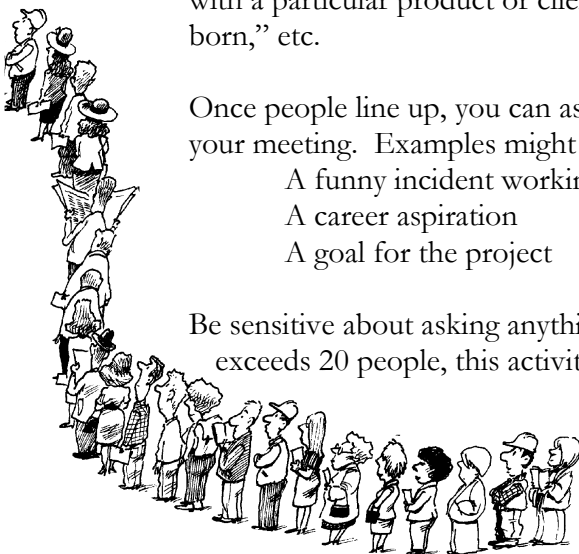
Meeting Opener - The Continuum

When you want to get people up and moving early in your meeting, try this approach. Ask people to line up based on “something.” That something could be “number of miles traveled to the meeting,” “number of years working in a particular function,” “number of months working with a particular product or client,” “distance from the meeting location to where you were born,” etc.

Once people line up, you can ask each to introduce herself and share something that relates to your meeting. Examples might be:

- A funny incident working with the client
- A career aspiration
- A goal for the project

Be sensitive about asking anything that might reveal a person’s age. Also, if your group size exceeds 20 people, this activity can become cumbersome.



We'd Like to Hear From You

Do you have a question for us or a topic you would like us to write about? We'd love to hear from you. Send an e-mail to sgerke@att.net with your question or ideas. We can't respond to each individually, however we will respond in *Collaborations* based on topics most requested.