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FISHING FOR **BETTER** EXECUTION

By John P. Foppe

Give a man a fish, and you'll feed him for a day. Teach him how to fish, and you'll feed him for a lifetime." The problem with either scenario is that you are still doing all the work. The same problem frequently occurs in companies today.

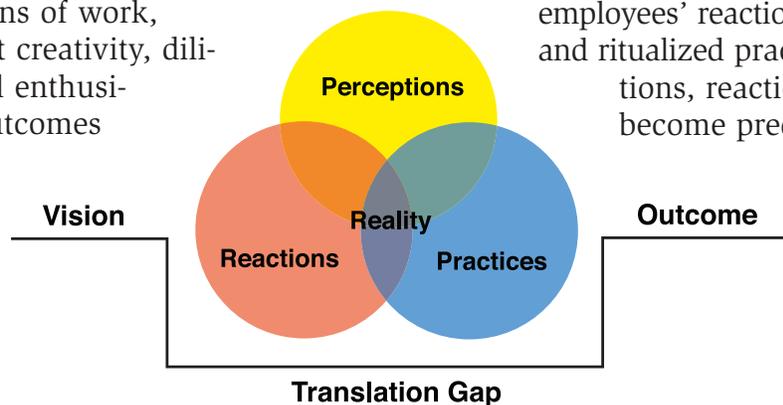
Organizations everywhere teach people to fish, but they tell them exactly which rod to use, where to fish, when to fish and how many fish to catch. Even though employees may correctly learn the techniques of fishing, unless they consciously choose and commit to fishing, being a fisherman remains someone else's job. Exasperated employees half-heartedly go through the motions of work, marking time without creativity, diligence, leadership and enthusiasm, often leaving outcomes unrealized.

Visions cannot consistently translate into outcomes unless employees internalize the

idea and commit to executing outcomes. Internalizing a vision means being the vision – living, eating, breathing, sleeping and sharing the dream. When employees embody the vision, they make things happen.

As a company casts a vision, its people automatically filter the message through their perceptions, reactions and practices. Consequently, a translation gap between the stated goal and the desired outcome often opens like a canyon, preventing organizations from reaching their preferred outcomes. As employees sift messages through their perceptions, they have subconscious emotional reactions. Over time, employees' reactions become formalized and ritualized practices. Patterned perceptions, reactions and practices become predominant and construct

an organizational reality. Employees take on a way of being that encodes itself into the fiber of an organization's



culture, either blocking the vision from becoming an outcome or bridging the gap.

Being human, everyone has times when they are more aware and in control of their perceptions, reactions and practices than at other times. Everyone lives and works on a track or continuum of growth. At the high end of each track are the learner, promoter, collaborator and innovator. Having these people on the team will guarantee things happen.

THE LEARNER

Learners primarily perceive their work as purposeful. They recognize there are many areas where they can help improve outcomes. They react with curiosity. These individuals become known for asking questions such as, “How can I help?” They realize that by asking questions about goals, methods and ethics, and by taking a position on issues, they are in fact being helpful.

Learners are usually candid and willing to share their views. They accept responsibility for their actions and are committed to high standards. These individuals are willing to disagree and are good at holding people accountable. Learners do not subscribe to being victims because they practice “checking in” on all issues and look for ways to be included in problem-solving and decision-making scenarios.

Here’s an example. Vanessa, Web and interactive media specialist for a marketing firm, has taken her job far beyond its description and does not shy away from challenges. Even though her role initially involved just supporting marketing operations and basic Web maintenance, she has made herself indispensable.

Vanessa has learned to produce podcasts and other programs. She learned how to use multiple complex programs for Web maintenance and to troubleshoot Web problems. No matter how complex the problem, Vanessa can track it down and solve it. Despite personal hardship, includ-

ing having to work part-time to take care of her mother, Vanessa refuses to slow down.

THE PROMOTER

Promoters look at work through the lens of viability. They are pragmatic and proficient individuals. They tend to be very insightful and are able to discern how to best invest their time and energy. They see the worthwhile nature of things. Promoters react by taking ownership. They consider themselves and their visibility to be valuable components in the promotion of shared accountability.

They tend to be likeable and are good at withholding judgment until they’ve heard all the facts. Promoters practice “buying in.” When they are on board, they can be counted on to follow through. These individuals can quickly assess situations and thoughtfully determine an effective course of action. Promoters are loyal and reliable advocates on the positions they hold and are enthusiastic and passionate about getting involvement from others.

Peggy, a vice president of a large pet food company, is a promoter. She is responsible for identifying social trends and harnessing emerging technologies to help her company adapt to consumers’

changing tastes. “We thought we were in the pet food business, fairly simple,” Peggy says. “The new economy showed us that we needed to rethink our business, our partnerships and what our customers want.”

Peggy helped launch a Web site that doesn’t sell pet food but provides information on pet care and health. “I relish doing something we haven’t done before,” she says. “I love figuring out new ways to help the company grow.”

THE COLLABORATOR

Collaborators view their work from a perspective of helpfulness. They are cooperative and accommodating. They are flexible and able to

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view situations from multiple perspectives. They primarily react by offering help.

These individuals are committed to spotting possibilities as they constantly scan the environment, asking, “Are there other ways?” They rarely share negative comments or gossip. They are effective listeners and communicators. They hear and respond to critical feedback comfortably and are able to offer vital feedback in a non-threatening manner. They easily work outside of their defined roles and practice “pitching in.” Because collaborators tend to be forward-thinking, they are good mediators and consensus-builders.

Besides his normal cleaning duties, Bernardo, a school custodian of 22 years in southern California, fixes pencil sharpeners, collects used balls for the kids and recently saved a kindergarten class from a pesky spider. His boss says, “Bernardo is a person who is always available to handle any and all issues. He devotes so much time and energy to his job. He goes above and beyond.”

THE INNOVATOR

Innovators see the world from a perception of abundance. Innovators are always scanning their environment for areas where they can make a difference. They look out for the good of the whole and recognize they are a critical link to the success of others. They react by inspiring others. These individuals are known for asking, “How do we?” They are eager to assist others in creating successful outcomes.

Innovators measure their success by the success of others. They are dependable and passionate about their work and are efficient, always considering their impact on others. Innovators practice “jumping in.” They have an authentic drive to contribute in meetings and are resourceful participants on projects. These individuals value creativity and are known for their confidence, inspired diligence and timeliness. They are good at helping others set priorities. Innovators tend to focus on relevance when identifying useful practices to generate outcomes.

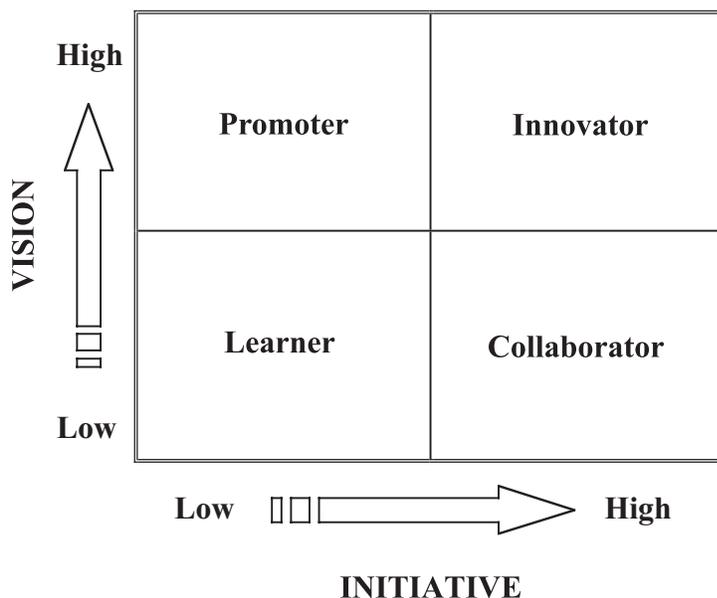
Jim, a lead analyst for the IT division of a large media company, is an innovator. He led a project that designed, built, configured and installed an anti-spam solution for the company.

Jim’s solution filters most of the spam and viruses before employees ever see them. He is available day and night, holidays and weekends, and always ready to help. “His work activities are being performed in the background ... however, the impact is essential,” his boss says.

How do you identify these people? Only a reliable assessment can definitively answer that question; however, two fundamental qualities qualify who they are: vision and initiative. All employees have some vision and initiative; some people’s levels are higher than others.

As companies strive to translate visions into outcomes, it’s important to remember people are “more than the sum of their parts.” Executing initiatives, like fishing, is more of an art than a science. When companies help employees be fishermen, workers tap their intrinsic motivation. As leaders, it is important to create shifts in perceptions, reactions and practices in which people release their natural drive, vision and initiative.

Rather than trying to get people involved, people get involved. Give a man a fish, and you’ll feed him for a day. Teach him to fish, and you’ll feed him for a lifetime... Help him to **be** a fisherman, and he’ll feed you.



Born without arms, John Foppe speaks, coaches and trains on how to maintain momentum when executing initiatives, and translate visions into outcomes. He is the CEO of Visionary Velocity Worldwide, based near St. Louis, MO. For further information, visit www.visionaryvelocity.com.