

Communication is Key to Teamwork

June 5, 2007

by Beverly King

Small Business Development Center

Weber State University

801-626-7232

Bking1@weber.edu

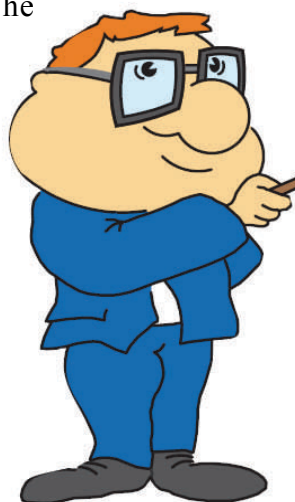
I debated a lot on a topic to discuss in this month's article. Marketing is always a good topic. Cash flow, internal controls, ratio analysis, human resources, all are good topics and ones that I hope to discuss in the future, but I settled on communication. Communication is an important part of performing my job well and is probably a very important part of success in your daily endeavors also. To operate a successful business, we need to communicate with our customers, our employees, our vendors and others. How we communicate may determine how pleasant our relationships are and it may determine how successful our business is.

A second reason for the topic this month is a recent experience that ties in so well. I have an associate, Scott Beck, who puts on team building/communication workshops. The program he has designed is exceptional at highlighting character traits, bringing out holes in communications skills and developing cooperative relationships. The uniqueness of his program compared to some other team building programs is that he uses horses as props. You can't con a horse.

I have worked with Scott for a couple years now and have seen his workshop, but last month our team of Utah SBDC personnel participated in his workshop for our own benefit. Scott starts out with an introduction that discusses the value of learning

from the experiences of others. He is very specific to state that we should not feel that we have to do anything on our own when there is so much history out there from others who have been there and can pass on their knowledge.

Scott has many, many different exercises; my group worked on maybe three and one-half. I won't go into specifics on each of the exercises, but will discuss one. As a team building exercise, three individuals linked arms; the person in the middle had both arms tied up and was designated as the brain of the group. The outside individuals each had one arm free. As a team, they were assigned to saddle a horse. Only the brain was allowed to speak and give direction for the arms to perform. One group had an experienced horseman in the group and designated him as the brain; all went well. The other groups had no clue how to saddle a horse, but they dived right in. They grabbed those saddles and manipulated them right up onto those ever-so-patient horses. I stopped one



group when things were getting a little dangerous on cinching up. Surprise, they then ask me how they should be doing it. I reprimanded another group when the arms were not following the instructions of the brain and was told bluntly that she didn't know what she was doing and needed help. This individual was labeled as the "control freak". Do you know one?

What did we learn? Now this is a group of well-educated individuals who teach the development of business plans. Not one group bothered to develop a plan before linking arms and jumping in. The

one group that chose the experienced horseman as the brain was the closest, but even they did not discuss the process before jumping in. Next, it was almost impossible for the members to ask for instruction. It was allowed. It had been discussed thoroughly, but no one took advantage until they were in trouble and frustrated. And cooperation, yes, they did see how cooperation was the only route, but that control freak still took over even after being told that he needed to let the more timid individual develop herself.

So, we had a fun and valuable learning experience. But how does this apply to you? Well the same answers. First, develop a plan. Can your organization sit down and strategize how to reach your next goal? Does everyone know the plan? How often do you just jump right in without discussing and strategizing it with your employees, co-workers, customers, vendors or other stakeholders?

Second, ask for guidance. How often do you take advantage of the wealth of experience available? My organization, the Small Business Development Center, is one place that you can ask for business help, but there are hundreds of other routes to go. Mentors can be invaluable, classes, books, the Internet, associations, co-workers, customers, and the list goes on and on. Someone out there can probably share a wealth of experience with you that will make your work easier.

Third, cooperation. As much as many of us would like to “just do it my way”, in most situations we will have a more enjoyable life and more successful experience if we look at how to cooperate in order to satisfy the need. How we communicate makes a difference. We can educate and add value to every life we touch, or learn and increase our own value, if we learn to cooperate and communicate.