

CATALYST

the **MARXGROUP**

Business Strategy | Marketing Communications

December 13, 2005

A Wish for the New Year

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I always try to take a few deep breaths at this time of the year. By doing so, I am able to acknowledge others and myself for the positive things that have happened – and let go of the disappointments. Even in the midst of the usual holiday hubbub, it feels great to pause and take it all in.

One of my primary advisors, Paul Cooperstein (www.businessmomentum.org), taught me a powerful methodology for this type of reflection that I'd like to share with you.

A Simple Practice

Ask your key staff (or a particular team, such as marketing) to stop what they are doing for a few hours, even a half day, including turning off all cell phones, Blackberries, laptops, etc. and gather together. Preferably, do this off-site.

Set up a safe environment in which to have the conversation. As a team you'll learn to have more compassion - and much less judgment - for each other by providing a forum in which the truth can be told. Setting a strong guideline for **listening with compassion** is key. Listening with compassion is defined as a deep appreciation and understanding of another person's feelings and experience. You'll be amazed at how much easier it is for people to incorporate new practices when people listen with compassion to the concerns of others. Rather than argue, defend, correct or embellish – just listen.

Have each person write down his or her **accomplishments** of the past year. Then go around the room and ask each person to read two items from their list. Keep going around the room until everyone's list has been read out loud.

Then ask everyone to write down his or her **disappointments**, and repeat the process.

Next ask everyone to write down what they believe are the lessons learned and to share those with the group in the same manner.

We always take a little extra time to discuss the **lessons learned**, and create a **parking lot** that contains ideas and possible projects that will eventually make their way onto our Marketing Action List.

Once the parking lot is full, STOP.

Now, take some time to allow the team members to acknowledge themselves and others for their accomplishments. Being specific is important.

We did this process at the beginning of our recent annual planning meeting.

Some of the accomplishments that were listed at our planning meeting included:

- Designed and delivered a re-branding program for a major client within 6-8 months
- Tom got his first public speaking gig
- Refurbished our website
- Won creative awards for a fourth year in a row

It is also very useful to acknowledge the stress, anxiety, uncertainty, frustrations and concerns.

How many of these fit your business?

- Not enough time to do the best job (budget limitations or multiple tasks that all need to be done at the same time)
- Not enough help (doing too many administrative tasks or wearing too many hats)
- Doing what is urgent rather than what is important
- Tactics overwhelm strategy--getting so caught up with the "to do's" that there is insufficient time for strategizing and thinking together

Then, to end on a positive note, the manager personally acknowledges team members for their accomplishments (he/she needs to take good notes during the reflection process). This is a time to be genuine and again, specific. Being acknowledged for increasing sales by 3.7%, or bringing in \$375,000 in new business, is much more powerful than being acknowledged for "doing a great job this year."

End the meeting with lunch (or dinner).

Long-lasting Rewards

We've learned a lot about our workmates and ourselves by incorporating this practice. We've learned about the values that are important to the organization as well as the individuals. We also get to complete whatever has been bugging us and we tell the truth about "the elephant in the living room" (that which usually goes unspoken). Listening with compassion is the key. After all, how can you move forward without the real truth?

Our wish for the New Year is that you take some time and pause to reflect – before the New Year (or shortly thereafter). We learned a lot from this process and have already initiated some changes to our workflow so people will feel more at peace and more accomplished. Try this with your business, and even with your family.

We wish you, your family and your associates a glorious holiday and a very healthy and prosperous 2006.