

Welcome to The Current. Our little 'ideasletter' has the big ambition of helping organisations get the most out of their people by innovating internally. At Flow we believe work should be an inspiring part of people's lives – in our experience companies that share this viewpoint are the leaders in their field and have a unique and sustainable form of competitive advantage, during good and tough times.

Now you know what we're going for there's one request we have. Our request is that as you read on you keep bearing in mind how you might be able to achieve something similar at your place. If you read on with a 'but that'll never work here' mentality you might as well stop right now.

We really hope you'll leave inspired to give something new a go and that it makes a difference. Feel free to pass it on to your colleagues and friends and do get in touch if you'd like to discuss anything further, share some feedback, or have your say about what we should cover in the next issue.



Very best wishes,  
Jon Allen, MD (07738 164758)

## The Current - Summer 2010

### Meetings reinvented

We believe meetings can play a big part in enabling businesses to achieve more with less people and build employee engagement at the same time. Here are a few examples of things we do and have come across that you might like to try.

- **Checking in** – at the beginning of all of our meetings at Flow we give everyone a couple of minutes each to share how they're doing and get anything off their chests. This helps ensure everyone is really focused and build great working relationships and we can flex the agenda to suit our needs.
- **Standing room only** – ASDA adopt a 'no chairs in meetings' policy. Stand up meetings create a more action-orientated vibe and avoid drawn out conversations that go nowhere and sap the spirit.
- **Big time** – putting wall timers in meeting rooms is an increasingly popular way to ensure attendees agree how long the meeting will last and stick to it. Google's are 4 feet tall!
- **Ideas for sale** – to our mind ideas are always the currency in idea sessions so we encourage our clients to shout old 'Sold!' when they hear an idea that they think is great and needs to be banked or built. It saves loads of discussion time and works like a dream. Give it a go. Sold?

*Conclusion...We spend most of our working lives in meetings; they drive corporate culture. Keep experimenting and challenging the rules to make them more human and inspiring – your people will thank you for it.*

### **Mirror, signal, manoeuvre**

To connect a PR team to the strategic picture we kicked off a recent Awayday by asking them to share iconic stories from their organisation's past. The session went down a storm and the room was bursting with pride at being a part of such a gutsy organisation that has made such a positive difference to consumer's lives. Using our brainstorming techniques and these stories as inspiration, the team went on to develop four big ideas that are now in development and set to make history in the future.

Sharing iconic stories from your heritage is a powerful and engaging way to help your people really 'get' what your organisation stands for and 'the way things are done round here'. Nike are fanatical about it. A number of their Senior Execs are tasked with sharing stories of the extraordinary lengths their founders went to make a difference to athletes - like making shoe moulds with the family waffle iron. Every new starter at Dyson spends their first day assembling a vacuum cleaner - a powerful way of connecting them to the product and to the heroic innovation efforts of their founder, Sir James Dyson, who painstakingly developed 5,127 prototypes before he struck gold with his 'G-force' cleaner in 1983.

*Conclusion...Stories from your past are a brilliant signpost to your people about the spirit of your organisation and what you expect from them. Once you've identified your key stories you can bring them to life in so many different ways. Definitely worth a go - especially if you're looking to start recruiting again soon.*

### **Out of office: I'm living with consumers today**

We love the kind of internal innovations that connect staff with consumers and empower them to develop fresh, insightful ideas. They are relatively low cost and have a profound impact on engagement. Here's a few of our favourites...

- New recruits at Kimberly Clark's Depend brand of incontinence pads are expected to 'wear' the product throughout their entire first weekend in the team and come back to share their experiences.
- ASDA have an 'Adopt a Mum' scheme for all regional Executives - they have to quite literally find a Mum and go shopping with her for 2 hours once a month.
- P&G's 'Living it, Working it' Programme engages employees by getting them away from the office and out into the lives of their consumers. 'Living it' entails staff actually living with target consumers for several days rather than stand behind a one way mirror in a focus group. 'Working it' places employees behind the counters of small shops so they can be part of the consumer's buying experience and appreciate for themselves the in-store impact of the product innovations they are responsible for.

*Conclusion...Time out to be with consumers and customers is a powerful and relatively low cost investment which recharges the batteries and engages hearts and minds. The way you capture and share the experience and insights gained is the key to getting the most from the process.*

### **It's a question of trust**

At the end of the day engagement always comes down to building trust. Unfortunately building trust is much easier said than done, especially given the high levels of uncertainty we currently face. Here are a couple of principles we've been using to good affect...

**Out the grapevine** – We kicked off a large leadership event by inviting the audience to share their headlines on what's been great over the last year and what they needed more of. We ran some internal focus groups beforehand to get a sense of what would come out to inform our overall design of the day. The session opened a dialogue from the word go, ensured there was a balanced perspective and gave the top team a chance to respond in an open and honest way. Delegates fed back that the day was powerful, informative and felt like 'their event'.

**Look to the good in people** – When helping to develop cultures we often find organisations have set up structures, policies etc that seek to stop a minority of people abusing the system. To our mind this is understandable but a bit like a teacher putting the whole class in detention because of the actions of one child. To develop a different approach we share examples from organisations like Ritz-Carlton who give each staff member access to a \$1,000 budget to delight a customer. They are asked to complete a form but don't have to ask for permission first.

*Conclusion...Trust is at the heart of engagement. The more trusting you are of your people; the more they will engage. Seek an open dialogue with them at every opportunity – if you don't it will only feed the grapevine.*

**If you've been affected by any of the material contained in this Ideasletter please do get in touch – we'd love to hear from you. You can email [jonallen@flow-development.co.uk](mailto:jonallen@flow-development.co.uk) or call him on + 44 7738 164758.**