

AP *Directions*

Fall 2008

EAF: Keep Up the Momentum!

Thanks to 180 of our Chapter 25 members, the EAF (Emergency Assistance Fund) pledges have reached \$15,376, and over \$11,000 have been collected to date. We have two major goals this year; surpass 485 members in our chapter and have over 200 paid pledges for EAF for the first time in our chapter.

We can do it! If you have not made a pledge and would like to, please visit www.ayp25.org or contact Michael Bennett, Chapter 25 EAF Chairman, at michael.bennett@peninsulaymca.org or (757) 867-3300 and he will be happy to email you a pledge form.

No gift is too small. We have received gifts from \$10 - \$500 this year. Whether you are a new AYP member or a seasoned veteran, your gift can offer hope and opportunity to a fellow AYP professional who has suffered through a tough situation.

Please, before you put this newsletter aside, complete a pledge form with a payment (check or credit card) to support an AYP peer. Your gift is also tax deductible.

Thanks again to all of you who have made an EAF donation.

Diversity & Inclusion for the 21st Century YMCA

Time is running out; register by October 15 for the 2008 Autumn Seminar: "Diversity & Inclusion for the 21st Century YMCA."

The seminar will be held on October 24 at YMCA Camp Thunderbird in Chesterfield, VA.

Why focus on Diversity and Inclusion?

During its more than 150 years in the United States, the YMCA has responded consistently and successfully to the demands of a constantly changing society as it has built strong kids, strong

families, strong communities. Our mission and our communities call on us to increase the intensity and effectiveness of the movement's diversity; and inclusion strategies. Learn more about providing the knowledge, tools and resources to respond to meet the current and emerging needs of the communities we serve.

Presented by Gayle Brock, Director of the National Black and Hispanic Achievers Program of the YMCA of the USA.

\$25 AYP Members
\$60 New AYP Members
(includes join fee & registration)

For more information or to register, contact Leslie Bryant at 757-223-7925 x207 or leslie.bryant@peninsulaymca.org.



Building A Learning Organization

A learning organization is one that learns and encourages learning among its people. It promotes exchange of information between employees, hence creating a more knowledgeable workforce. This produces a very flexible organization where people will accept and adapt to new ideas and change through shared vision.

It is said that the only constant in life is change, and organizations are not spared. Change brings about not only uncertainty and risks, but also opportunities for growth. Those organizations that can manipulate the information available have a bigger chance to succeed. It is therefore important for everyone to be more knowledgeable about the work environment they are in. Building a learning organization is a means to a business goal. It is not a new theory, but rather a concept that has become an increasingly widespread philosophy in modern companies.

'Systems Thinking' takes a holistic approach to learning whereby not only does the organization learn but so do all its employees, irrespective of their role within the organization. Information has to be disseminated to all levels and does not stop at top management, thus, facilitating learning through flexibility and open communication by removing barriers to communication and adopting flatter organizational structure and design.

Therefore the message is clear: any organization that is committed to future success must become



a learning organization in order to compete and survive. Today continuous improvement is a must." Any organization is only as good as its people and continuous improvement in business is about the development of people and therefore creating a learning culture." (Sheppard)

Systems Thinking

The idea behind the concept coined 'Systems Thinking' in the 1950's was that enterprises need to be aware of both the company as a whole as well as the individuals within the company - taking a holistic approach to managing. Gould-Kreutzer Associates Inc. defined it as "a framework for seeing interrelationships rather than things; to see the forest and the trees." System Thinking therefore tries to change the managerial view so it includes the ambitions of the individual workers, not just the business goals.

However, it was only during the 1990's that this concept started to be taken seriously by

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organizations. Systems Thinking nowadays is synonymous with Peter Senge, one of the modern day gurus, who in his book "The Fifth Discipline: The Art and Practice of The Learning Organization" popularized the concept of the learning organization, and referred to 'Systems Thinking' as the Fifth Discipline. Since its publication in 1990, more than a million copies of this book have been sold and in 1997, Harvard Business Review identified his book as one of the seminal management books of the past 75 years.

According to Senge, learning organizations are "organizations where people continually expand their capacity to create the results they truly desire, where new and expansive patterns of thinking are nurtured, where collective aspiration is set free, and where people are continually learning to see the whole together." The five disciplines that he identifies are said to be common to all learning organizations. They are:

1. Personal Mastery

This is the discipline of 'continually clarifying and deepening our personal vision, of focusing our energies, of developing patience, and of seeing reality objectively.' People with a high level of personal mastery live in a continual learning mode, continually clarifying and deepening their personal vision.

2. Mental Models

These are 'deeply ingrained assumptions, generalizations, or even pictures and images that influence how we understand the world and how we take action.' This happens consciously and unconsciously and therefore, if team members can, through positive, constructive criticism, challenge each others' ideas and assumptions, they can begin to perceive their mental models, and to change these to create a shared mental model for the team.

3. Building Shared Vision

Senge sees this as 'the capacity to

hold a shared picture of the future we seek to create.' When there is a genuine vision (as opposed to the all-to-familiar 'vision statement'), people excel and learn. To create a shared vision, large numbers of people within the organization must draft it, empowering them to create a single image of the future. With a shared vision, people will do things because they want to, not because they have to.

4. Team Learning

Such learning is viewed as 'the process of aligning and developing the capacities of a team to create the results its members truly desire.' It builds on personal mastery and shared vision, but these are not enough. People need to be able to act together, as virtually all important decisions occur in groups. The learning ability of the group becomes greater than the learning ability of any individual in the group.

5. Systems Thinking

The cornerstone of any learning organization is this fifth discipline. This is the ability to see the bigger picture, to look at the interrelationships of a system as opposed to simple cause-effect chains. Systems Thinking shows us that the essential properties of a system are not determined by the sum of its parts but by the process of interactions between those parts. This is the discipline used to implement the other disciplines. Without it each of the disciplines would be isolated and would fail to achieve its objective.

BUILDING A SOUND BASE

Before a Learning Organization can be achieved, a solid foundation has to be in place. This can be implemented by taking into account the following points.

Awareness

Awareness of the benefits of a learning organization must permeate to all levels not just the management level. A learning culture must be fostered among the employees that survival of the fittest depends on having a knowledgeable workforce. Change should start and be supported from top management and this 'new' culture should be manifested in the commitment to learning, personal development of the individual as well as valuing people and their divergent views.

The Environment

Centralized, mechanistic structures do not create a good environment. An organic structure places less emphasis on giving and taking orders and more on encouraging managers and subordinates to work together in teams and to communicate openly with each other. Authority, responsibility and accountability flow to employees with the expertise required to solve problems.

Leadership

Managers must adopt open communication management styles so that employees will be able to question and come forward with ideas. Understand that mistakes and errors are part of this process and therefore employees should not be in fear of reprimands. Managers

must also provide commitment for long-term learning in the form of resources (money, personnel and time). The amount of these resources determines the quantity and quality of learning.

Empowerment

Employees should be empowered to take decisions and actions. Let them own the process whilst monitoring all that is happening. Only through motivation and innovation will the employees grow and learn, equal participation should be encouraged so that employees can learn from each other simultaneously.

Learning

Company-wide training is to be made available. This may take the form of simulation case studies where brainstorming sessions will be beneficial to all participants.

APPLY THE GOLDEN RULES

The following practices and approaches can be used while managing the learning process.

1. Thrive on change.

Management must not be afraid of change. Change is necessary and will translate itself into a learning opportunity.

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2. Encourage experimentation.

Change will bring along uncertainty and risks. Experimentation is a necessary risk. Accept mistakes. Learning from mistakes is often more powerful than learning from success.

3. Communicate success and failure.

Let there be a communication system of disseminating information and knowledge that reaches everyone efficiently, for example, through company journals, website, job rotation programs, etc.

4. Facilitate learning from the surrounding environment.

Learn from internal factors such as processes and procedures at work and find ways of how to improve learning from competitors. Apply an outside-in policy to strategies. Customers provide free advice through their complaints, suggestions and surveys. After all, the organization survives through satisfying customers. Theirs might be the best advice.

5. Facilitate learning from employees.

Offer continuous learning and multi-skilling opportunities. Remove hierarchies and empower people to experiment and make decisions.

He who ignores discipline despises himself, but whoever heeds correction gains understanding.

Proverbs 15:32 (NIV)

6. Reward learning.

Have a proper performance appraisal system to reward those employees who are embracing the learning culture to boost morale. Remember that everybody wants their work to be appreciated.

7. Intentionally retrieve and retain company memory.

It is important to keep a record of processes and achievements so that learning will not be lost; it can be passed on to those coming later on into the company and also the company can refer back to information held.

Through the learning organization process people will develop, the brains of all employees are switched on, and a feel good factor is created through greater motivation. People will become more creative and social interaction will improve. Teams and groups will work better through knowledge sharing, becoming more interdependent, increasing responsibility at

all levels and developing an entrepreneurial spirit. The company will benefit from better customer relations, the breaking down of traditional communication barriers, and from the increased creativity and innovation of its people that should give it a competitive edge.

Sandro Azzopardi is a professional author who writes articles on his web site and local newspapers. <http://www.theinfopit.com/business/learning/buildingalearningorganisation-1.php>

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Visit us Online!

If you haven't visited our redesigned website, you're missing out! Chapter 25's new, updated site can still be found at www.ayp25.org, so check it out today.

See where the next training is being held, find out about the latest AYP news or link to YMCA job listings.

Submit your photos to be used in the "Image of the Month" section or network with other AYP members in the forum. Ask for advice, share your current project and be inspired by others' creativity!

Visit www.ayp25.org to get started today!



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