

The Collective Next Cards

.....

At Collective Next, we partner with our clients to create meaningful change. We have delivered more than 1,000 successful collaborative engagements across a wide variety of industries. The Collective Next Cards, from which this booklet is drawn, can help your team consider some of the big imperatives we explore with our clients.

Guidelines on the cards such as Share and Make New Mistakes may seem straightforward, but we've learned that they yield surprises, too. Such open-ended instructions often lead to spirited discussion and collaboration. Don't Go It Alone, for example, may mean something different to you than it does to the colleague sitting next to you. The magic comes when you compare those individual definitions and work, together, toward something you might never have gotten to by yourself.

A little background as to where all this came from:

During one of our twice-a-year all-hands extravaganzas, one of our breakout groups explored different ways we could share, both with our clients and with our extended network of collaborators, the lessons and approaches that are most important to us. During that spirited

session, we came up with a series of imperatives that defined how we try to work with our clients, with our collaborators, and among ourselves. We also decided to keep each lesson brief and open-ended, so people reading them could consider and discuss how they try to live up to them.

We produced and distributed these lessons as oversized trading cards, designed by our Evan Wondolowski. Then we expanded them as posts on our blog, *Collaboration Illustrated*, which is at collectivenext.com/blog. Our collaborators and clients have found the cards and the posts useful and provocative. In this booklet, we've further revised the posts in the hope of even greater impact. Individually, each entry offers a succinct and sometimes counterintuitive lesson, inspiring creativity and innovation. Taken as a whole, we hope this serves as a toolkit for you to help your team come together, think better, and move forward. ♦



Make New Mistakes



by Kathy Clemons-Beasley

Make New Mistakes: I love this saying. While thinking about this lesson, I was listening to one of my favorite podcasts, Girl on Guy. Aisha Tyler conducts lengthy interviews with interesting people (actors, comedians, and an eclectic mix), and even if I have no idea who she's talking to, I learn something, hear something interesting, or find something inspiring. (An aside: some content on the show isn't safe for work, but out of 136 interviews I've listened to, there are a mere two that I didn't find interesting. Listen!)

One of my favorite episodes includes an interview with the actor Charles Michael Davis, and he and Aisha get to talking about taking risks. Here's the key quote:

"Perfectionism is guarding against uncertainty. Confidence is being certain in uncertainty."

Exactly. This is what making new mistakes is all about.

***Make new mistakes
in ways that build on
what you've learned
from previous ones.***

First, make mistakes — part of what we try to do with our clients is help them see new possibilities, push the edges of their boundaries. We are bound to make mistakes, but we are also bound to figure some things out that weren't evident at the start.

Second, make *new* mistakes — that's called learning. Try something different the next time, and see if it works better or differently — not in a reckless way, but in a way that is informed by and builds on what you learned from the last situation.

There is a lot of power in figuring out how to ride that wave of uncertainty. For leaders, acknowledging uncertainty actually increases credibility. It invites people into a conversation. Perfectionism is the enemy of a lot of what we are required to do in business today — deliver quality, get there quickly, be effective — and being comfortable making new mistakes is one way to combat it. ♦



Everything Speaks



by Dave Rutley

I am not a detail-oriented person. However, I've been lucky to be mentored and taught by folks such as Matt Taylor, Michael Bell, Kelsey Bird, and many others who impressed upon me the importance of the term "Everything Speaks." Work does not occur in a vacuum. The environment and experience that surround and support our work is just as important as the actual work itself.

We ask our clients to make hard choices during our design sessions. Those choices have meaningful impacts not only on their business but also on the people that work with and for them — and for the clients and customers who use their products or services.

We believe that creating an intensely intentional environment and human experience helps ensure that these decisions and designs are as thoughtful as possible.

Everything Speaks means that details matter. We've all had the experience in which a poor interaction has taken what could have been a good or neutral moment and made it a bad one.

For instance, you walk up to a table with nametags on it and you don't see a tag there for you. It immediately can spark self-doubt ("Was I invited to this session? Why was I left off the list?") or frustration ("They aren't even organized enough to have all the right tags out here. This is going to be a waste of my time.").

The same is true of the physical space where a meeting occurs. A piece of paper on the floor near a trash can, a marker cap underneath a table, or random writing on a white board — they all create space for a participant to doubt the meeting and the process or question the abilities of the facilitation team.

On the flip side, an environment and experience that is perfectly orchestrated not only allows the participants to focus on the work and only the work, but also models a great solution and can subconsciously help set their expectations for their own success.

This orchestration includes many little things that add up to a perfect harmony. For instance: walking into a breakout area and having exactly the right number of chairs. Or when you head to a whitewall to take notes, having all the markers you need, as well as an eraser for when you need to make that inevitable iteration. It's

about having the same person who designed the meeting, is facilitating it, come over to your table as lunch time wraps and helps clear your dishes so that you can continue to focus on your assigned deliverable. It's even about the music — where the word choice, rhythm, speed, and volume of the song being played as a correlation to the design of the event, and the expectations of the participants in that moment.

Everything Speaks can seem like a burden. There are so many things to manage that sometimes it feels impossible to do them all perfectly. Instead you have to look at this as an opportunity and know that everything we tweak, everything we decide about the environment and experience, gives our participants that much more of an advantage, that much more of a chance at real success. ♦



Be Curious



by Kate Dwyer

At Collective Next we're encouraged (and expected, honestly) to approach our work with a wide-eyed curiosity. We have a way of looking at things differently. We're a diverse and passionate group of illustrators, sculptors, chefs, surfers, miniature village architects, musicians, karaoke champions, actors, writers, painters, costume makers, runners, world travelers, and generally clever DIY-ers. We are curious by nature; we don't need our company onboarding handbook or training manual to tell us to be curious.

We're surrounded by cool artwork, quirky and inspirational office décor, and each other. We're enveloped by a culture that fosters curiosity, creativity, and collaboration. Our open office spurs sudden brainstorming and pro-

motes blatant butting in. We question each other in an environment that encourages feedback. We challenge and support each other. We push each other and our clients. And our work is better for it.

Our open office spurs sudden brainstorming and blatant butting in.

We get paid to think differently. We show up and clients expect us to be the "creative" ones. Sometimes we notice sighs of relief when we walk into a room. We trick them into realizing their creative potential by pushing and prodding, asking critical questions, often the ones that are the scariest to consider. Our curiosity sparks theirs.

You may not work for a company like Collective Next where creativity, curiosity, and collaboration are built into the fabric of our work. But, wherever you are, here are a few tips for cultivating an inquiring mind.

- Keep an open mind. Don't be married to your ideas and perceptions.
- Ask questions (always) ... and never stop (seriously).
- Be daring. Take a different approach. Don't be afraid to flip a concept sideways or deconstruct it just to see what would happen if you tackle it from a different vantage point.
- Have fun! Let go of your serious self for a minute, propose a seemingly crazy idea or two, and see what happens. ♦



Hone Your Craft



by Annie White

There are a lot of different crafts, or skills, that are part of my job as an Art Director at Collective Next, whether it is about people, budget, time, or process. But, to me, the one craft that can be simultaneously most exciting and challenging is design.

Being an Art Director at Collective Next means I have the opportunity to lead more projects and work with great clients — as well as talented colleagues and contractors. But it also means that I do less hands-on design, which is OK because I love what I do. When I do have the opportunity to own a design project, I sometimes reference a folder on my desktop, where I save clippings of interesting graphics, fonts, and color palettes that I find during my online travels.

More often than not, this folder is empty. I don't take enough time to wander around Pinterest, read design blogs, open a design magazine. I need to remind myself often: Hone Your Craft.

To hone my craft, I must also own it. It's my responsibility to stay on top of trends, and keep my ideas fresh.

***Ideas and inspiration
are meant to be shared,
so they can be built
upon, refined, made
different and new.***

The folder on my desktop will not magically fill itself. So the second thing I need to remember is: Own Your Craft.

In my work, I believe that ideas and inspiration are meant to be shared. Not stolen or copied, but shared, so they can be built upon, refined, made different and new. This exchange of ideas, this collaboration, has always been an important premise to both learning and teaching at my job, and it's one that I try to remember to practice: Loan Your Craft.

Writing this blog post has taken more time than I care to admit, but has been a great exercise — and a reminder that it's time to go fill that folder. ♦



Share



by Tricia Walker

Goldfish crackers, Legos, and crayons. These are the things that preschoolers share. Experiences, best practices, and perspectives. These are the things that adults should share.

As a child, you are asked to share your things. If you are willing to give up a little bit of your piece of something, you are generous. As an adult, you are seldom asked to share your things. It's the intangibles that are considered to be of value. Generous adults share their experience with others. Why is that what's valuable?

Giving a bit of your knowledge and wisdom is the greatest gift you can give. This is true in so many settings, and it is absolutely true in the workplace. Part of my calling and my pas-

sion over the many years I've worked at Collective Next has been to make sure that all of our experience is shared with the newest members of our community. This business of facilitating collaborative sessions has a lot of philosophy and experience behind it! We don't want our clients to suffer a less than excellent experience while they're working with us, so we share. We know that sharing is the way to deliver the best experience possible to our clients.

Many of our clients don't have opportunities to share with one another. Or perhaps they just need help creating those opportunities, and that's where we come in. We design the space for sharing, and it's a big part of the reason that we are able to promise an

accelerated result. Getting the perspective of your colleagues is one of the best ways we know to increase the "stickiness" of any solution, and we know that you'll benefit from sharing with each other.

All companies benefit when its people share with one another.

Sharing is a close cousin to collaboration, but there is something about sharing that goes beyond collaboration: You can share with no expectation of getting anything back. Collaboration promises the possibility of a solution or thing that you create together. Sharing only promises that you leave the situation with the knowledge that your wisdom, your viewpoint, or your idea is now resident in another person.

All companies can benefit when individuals make the commitment to share what they have with each other.

There are simple ways to make that happen:

- Propose an informal meeting with someone outside of the work you're doing to elicit his or her perspective on something you're working on. Make sure you have a defined start and end to the meeting to be respectful of their time.
- Think of something that you're really good at, and let people you work with know that you are willing to help them in that area.
- Offer someone new some informal guidance (if you think they'll be open to it). Invite them to lunch to see how they are feeling in their new role and figure out what you have to share about your own experience that may be useful.

I'm always so grateful whenever my colleagues are willing to share something with me, and I'm happy to share what I have with them! I just hope no one asks me to share my snacks. Those are off limits. ♦



Go The Right Speed



by Geoff Amidei

"I took a speed-reading course and read War and Peace in twenty minutes. It involves Russia."

—WOODY ALLEN

Chances are you have a long-standing relationship with speed. (I'm referring only to the property of moving bodies, not pharmaceuticals or any movies starring Keanu Reeves, Sandra Bullock, and a bus.) Most of us have been worrying about speed since we were young. Maybe you were the fastest kid on the playground. Or maybe you wanted to be. After you outgrew your first bicycle, you likely graduat-

ed to a bike with speeds. When you learned to drive, what did you have to negotiate? Speed limits.

We're biased when it comes to speed. Generally — at least in our work — we are biased toward higher rates of speed. Go faster. Show a sense of urgency. Speed to market! Speed is good, until it's not. Because, then, you know, speed kills.

Physics refresher: Speed was first measured by Galileo Galilei in the late 16th or early 17th century. He's credited with articulating it as the distance something travels per unit of time. So speed implies motion. An object at rest, traveling no distance, has a speed of ... anyone? Anyone? ... Zero. Speed also implies distance and di-

rection. In order to measure speed, an object must travel from one point to a different point.

What's most important is understanding that clients are on a journey.

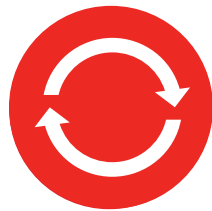
At Collective Next, we're not concerned with moving bodies through space over time. We're here to help people and organizations move from one state to a different, more desirable state using collaboration. So when we urge our friends, colleagues, and clients to Go the Right Speed, we are not primarily concerned with the time it will take them to get where they want to go.

What's most important is understanding that they are on a journey. We are concerned with the distance they must travel, their direction, who's going with them, the conditions they will encounter, and why they are going. We are concerned with the context and objectives of their journey.

In our world of collaborative problem solving, going the right speed is about awareness — awareness of much more than distance divided by time. ♦



Iterate



by Bree Sanchez

Get Messy. It's Saturday morning. The kids and I are whipping up birthday breakfast for Daddy: pancakes! My three-year-old is "measuring" flour and buttermilk. My five-year-old is cracking eggs and shaking her shoulders to James Brown. Vigorous batter stirring ensues as I fire up the stove-top. The kids stop and stare as I ladle out enough batter for the first pancake and gently pour it into the hot skillet.

The too-runny batter starts smoking around the edges. I turn down the heat and try to flip up the edge of the goo with my spatula. I manage to flip the hotcake, but when I do, it folds almost in half. The cooked side is blond, not the desired golden brown. "Mommy, that doesn't look like a pancake I want to eat," says my girl. "Don't worry," I reply.

"This is just the first pancake. We have a lot more chances to get this right."

The first pancake is always a mess. That's OK; it teaches you what you need to know about the second pancake, the third pancake, and so on. The important thing is to accept imperfection, learn, and keep going.

Begin. Some days it feels like Professional First Pancake Maker should be my official job title. To move forward you must begin. Much of the time, my job is to help people begin.

When I am graphic facilitating, my role is often to listen to a group of people think out loud, while quietly sketching a synthesized visual model or prototype of their ideas. If it's

messy, I know I'm on the right track.

There is often a moment when someone in the audience looks up from the conversation and notices what I am doing and says, "Hey! That's what we're talking about." There are sometimes little sighs of relief or gratitude, and then, "But wait, we need to just change this part ..." They take the marker and they're off. I love that.

Repeat. Iterate is just a fancy word for "repeat." Charles Severance of the University of Michigan writes, "An endless source of amusement for programmers is the observation that the directions on shampoo, 'Lather, rinse, repeat,' are an infinite loop because there is no iteration variable." I code in my spare time, and it's true: I find this endlessly amusing.

Our clients enlist us to help go beyond their entrenched infinite loops — tired patterns of thinking, talking, and working — and move forward. While there is certainly value in repetition (clean

hair, toned biceps, Gregorian chants), we at Collective Next are masters of and total geeks for the iteration variable. We are always listening for shifts, divergence, and feedback, and using these to guide intelligent iteration. In collaborative design sessions, we layer the agenda with rounds of iteration in which problems and solutions are approached from multiple vantage points and tested against a wide variety of scenarios. We believe that this creates engagement, alignment, and vastly better solutions.

Ship. As anyone who watches *Project Runway* knows, at some point you've got to present your idea in public. Short development cycles amplify creative intent and momentum. Whether you're making a dress out of licorice or a stack of pancakes, writing your TED Talk script, or designing the next iPhone, know when to keep iterating — and when to call it done. ♦



Be Human



by Gordon Eby



At Collective Next, we try to be excellent at being human. That's a strange idea to write down, being excellent at something that you inherently are, but I think being human is something that is forgotten these days, especially in our results-driven world.

We don't want to shy away from being human; in fact, we want to own it. We connect to our clients' humanity by factoring it into how we design our events, how we cater to all learning styles when we deliver work, how we give everyone a voice, and how we help people's stories better resonate with their audiences.

One way that we try to be excellent at being human is by giving back to the communities we work in. In re-

cent years, we have partnered with UP Academy Boston, an ambitious charter school in South Boston. I recently asked Jamie Morrison, the school's principal, to tell me how he thought Collective Next brought "being human" to the work we have done together.

We connect to our clients in the ways we design our events, how we help people's stories resonate more deeply with their audiences, and more.

Jamie highlighted three areas:

- Our investment in helping the school improve its work/life balance;
- Helping his team of educators be the best they can be so they can do more for their students; and
- Applying a way of working that values the opinions, philosophies, and experiences of all stakeholders.

These are the types of human challenges that Collective Next is built for. They are the type of challenges we look for — where we can help an organization improve its performance and be more human, too. ♦



Think Inside The Box



by Matt Saiia

“Think outside the box” is a shorthand way to describe the act of trying to stop looking at things in the same old ways. There’s great value, of course, in developing new ideas and approaches. We can all intuitively embrace the spirit of free thinking without limits, but the term “think outside the box” has lost much of its meaning through repetition. It has become a management cliché. We at Collective Next have seen in engagement after engagement that constraints can lead to creative breakthroughs — limitations can’t be wished away — and that’s why we spend a lot of time thinking about how we and our clients can better think inside their box.

That box is not just a metaphor. It’s quite real. It represents context, the

real world in which we operate, the rules and structures that exist. The context may shift, but there’s always context. We can’t wish away gravity. Ideas that ignore this reality, the limits of the box, rarely get off the page and into practice.

We practice collaborative design rather than simply design things for clients.

When we talk about the box, we’re talking about context. Ideas that ignore context tend to be less valuable than those that acknowledge the context of the box. Why? Because they’re less likely to get done. What’s more productive than box-free think-

ing? Knowing your box and using its constraints to create something that can succeed in the real world.

This plays out vividly as organizations attempt to copy best practices they’ve seen other organizations implement. Here’s an example: The Venezuelan youth orchestra El Sistema deservedly won a TED Prize for its work. The organization’s wish was that the TED Prize would fund bringing El Sistema to the world. Here, it was thought, was a best practice that could be applied to new countries. But it turned out that you can’t replicate El Sistema note-for-note in the U.S. You can learn from it, learn what made it successful, but you have to translate it into a new environment for it to succeed. You had to recognize which box you were working in.

People hire consultants all the time to bring them best practices. But the idea that best practices will work in your company without authentic translation is a fallacy. You have to

bring imagination into your box and then transform it. It’s like organ donation. You can place a perfect heart into a perfect body and you can still get plenty of complications. If you don’t take into account the unique needs of particular organizations, you’re setting yourself up for catastrophic failure.

So when someone asks us to graft someone else’s best practices onto their existing organization, we push back. We practice collaborative design rather than simply design things for you. When Collective Next helps our clients design solutions for themselves, we’re ensuring that the ideas are true to who they are as an organization, making them more likely to be adopted and ultimately more likely to be successful, and we make the box they’ve chosen to operate in a better place to be. ♦



Be Courageous



by Jennifer Rutley

It's hard not to think about the Cowardly Lion from *The Wizard of Oz* when I hear the word "courage." It's a message reinforced continuously when we are little: Be courageous! As a parent, I often find myself telling my kids not to be scared, whether they're trying a new sport, talking with a new friend, or touching a hermit crab for the first time. From a parent's perspective, it's easy to see how important courage is to your child succeeding in life. At times I get frustrated that my kids can't see how silly their fear is and how much they will gain from taking one small step. I've also learned that most of the time their fear has more to do with anticipation than the actual action itself. The more they think about it, the harder it becomes to act.

As an adult, being courageous is just as important. Without courage, we become stale in our relationships, jobs, and life. We become complacent because we're too afraid of failure to take risks or put ourselves out there.

***Being genuine was
key to my success.
I didn't need to be
perfect right away.***

When I first started facilitating, I was scared of what others would think of me in the front of the room. It wasn't natural for me. I didn't have an acting or teaching background and I was never taught presence. I'd been a math major at a technical school. I thought the easiest thing would be to

copy others who I'd seen hundreds of times "performing" in front of the group. I felt uncomfortable and awkward. It just wasn't me.

I had a great mentor at the time. As I often do with my kids, he really pushed me. Before I could think too much or second-guess myself, he would introduce me to a new situation. I may not have thought I was prepared, but that didn't matter. He gave me no time for anticipation. Through this process, I learned a lot about myself. I learned that being genuine was key to my success. I also learned that I didn't need to be perfect right away. It was more about taking the risk and learning. I realized it was a waste of time to compare myself to anyone else. It was better to focus on the connection I could

make with session participants and gain confidence through practice and results. I made lots of mistakes during these first few years, but that's part of being courageous. It's about knowing that even though you may not be perfect at something, or even close for that matter, the upside is much greater than any risk of failure.

I would like to thank Chris Burke for being the mentor who had the courage to trust in me and push me to be the facilitator I am today. ♦



If It Works, Work It



by Kristen Bailey

I've spent a fortune on cleaning products in an effort to have a spotless stovetop, a smudge-free refrigerator, a streakless mirror. "New & improved!" "No streaks!" "Organic!" For years, my Aunt Noey told me to try vinegar and water on glass. "It works!" she exclaimed. But I thought she's old fashioned and out of touch with new innovative products. I ignored her ... until I had a stubborn glass orb light fixture over my dining table. Every time the light changed in the room, I'd notice a new streak or a fingerprint. In desperation, I pulled out the vinegar. Magic. I should have listened.

At Collective Next, we say "if it works, work it." Recently, I designed a collaborative working session for a group of executives exploring the question:

"How can our culture enable us to address the challenges of the future and be the best in our industry?"

The company is already a leader. It's lauded for its culture. This session needed to stretch their thinking, provoke new thoughts, open up new insights, and give the executives a chance to think as opposed to act. I proposed an activity in which the execs would break into teams, each with a set of readings about what others are doing, how culture is changing, and how the workforce and customers are changing. The pushback: "What? You want the executives to read? Quietly? Without their phones or computers?" This will never work. Vinegar. We must pull the key insights out of the articles and present them via PowerPoint.

But that would have defeated the purpose. We want the executives to have the space to think and to draw their own insights, based on their unique knowledge of the company, strategy, customers. And then, we want them to have a conversation about it — combine their insights to create new ideas, not simply extract what was said in an article.

"You want executives to read? Quietly? Without their phones or computers?"

This made people uncomfortable. Our session sponsors were nervous. I pulled the "trust me" card. And I had to re-

assure myself: "You know this works. Work it." We made sure that every article, video clip, and book excerpt was rich and thought-provoking. Then we let the execs do their thing. And it was quiet. And they read. Some even used highlighters. And then the talking began, people were engaged, and great new ideas emerged.

The business world has gotten fancy. High tech, low touch. Fast. Efficient. "New and Improved." Sometimes, though, you still need vinegar. Thanks, Noey. ♦



Look Both Ways



by Mary Choi-Smith

We automatically caution our kids to look both ways before crossing the street. It's an instinctive rule to protect them from harm.

Talk to someone about something they're passionate about.

Rather than serving only as a cautionary command, I think of looking both ways also as a reminder to consider other points of view and empathize — to understand and know more than we did before. If we don't look both ways in this context, we won't know what we don't know. The results of not looking both ways could range from being less than they otherwise might be to disastrous.

One of the things I love about facilitating collaborative work with Collective Next is modeling this idea of stretching ways of thinking about how to solve problems or build something together. As part of our design principles, we push clients and teams to consider different perspectives, to ask and answer the right questions that will help them achieve their objectives.

Think about how some of their thinking might apply to your work.

Smart, sharp, successful people often approach a challenge believing they know the solution already. But looking at the challenge in multiple ways

helps build better solutions. If you haven't looked both ways in a long time, give it a try and see what your experience is. Ask the kids in your life for their take on how they might approach a big challenge, like climate change. Read a more liberal or conservative news source than you usually do so you can consider how others believe their views as passionately as you do yours. Talk to an artist or musician or scientist or athlete about a project they're passionate about — and think about how some of their thinking might apply to one of your projects.

Look both ways. Look many ways. It's enriching and makes the journey a lot more fun. ♦



Own It



by Travis Martin

To many, the first thing that comes to mind when you hear someone utter the words “own it” is a house, a car, maybe even a small animal. To others it expresses defeat: “Tom Brady just got owned by that linebacker.” The term can also be used to encourage another person. You really feel that way? Own it.

How do you own it? For some, it is the confidence in the way they present themselves and how they interact with those around them. Others see it as the commitment they make to themselves. Often we rationalize it as courage, but you can be courageous and still lack confidence.

Consciously demonstrating your confidence in your capabilities: That’s

how you really own it. It’ll come out in how you present yourself to a room full of people, or when you paddle into a ten-foot wave and drop into it at a blistering speed. You know the consequences but you’re still going to do it, because you also know the potential payoff.

People will notice if you show the slightest bit of skepticism or lack of confidence.

This is essential to our work at Collective Next. We must exhibit confidence in everything we do, regardless of the consequences, because the rewards

far outweigh those consequences. When we work with a client in person or on the phone, we must show up with confidence, which builds trust with the client. People notice it if you show the slightest bit of skepticism or lack of confidence. It can drastically affect your credibility you worked so hard to develop.

Confidence in yourself and your abilities will take you far. You have to step up and do it on purpose, own it, to realize this potential. Think about the reward. If you just own it, the consequences are irrelevant. ♦



Test Yourself, Trust Yourself



by Evan Wondolowski

It's testing and trusting that brings inventions to realization. Necessity, by itself, isn't mother to anything. It only aids in creating an environment ready to foster exploration and innovation.

We challenge ourselves to develop new and exciting experiences for our clients. At times they may be out of our comfort zone. For instance, I once wore a full-body polyester gorilla suit to a conference.

With trust issues behind us, we can get to the real problem.

Doing new things requires trust and experimentation. Our business needs to trust us to add value; we need to

trust ourselves to be able to deliver; most important, our clients need to trust us enough to pilot a new product. Once all those trust issues are out of the way, we can address the real problem. This is the test phase where we research possibilities, experiment with some ideas, and start to develop an innovative solution.

At a recent client offsite we did just that. The client had already decided to use super-scribing (real-time digital visual capture) at the event, but the client also wanted to show an artifact from the scribing. It would have been easy enough to create static images of the resulting images, but we recognized that it could be more engaging for the participants if we produced a video

of the scribing in action that could be set to loop in a common area throughout the event. The participants would then see the video as they left the room and it would reinforce what they just experienced inside the room.

We research possibilities, experiment with ideas, and start to develop an innovative solution.

This clip, which was for a financial services client, was one of nine we did for speakers at an event. They were all 15-to-20-minute-long talks; our challenge was to listen and perform

real-time scribing not in the same room as the speaker. We created and synthesized simultaneously, pulling out key points, connecting them, capturing the main points in real time — and we had to do it nine times over the course of a day. Talk about testing yourself and trusting yourself. ♦



Don't Blame



by Kathy Clemons-Beasley

At Collective Next, we spend a lot of time diagnosing problems, separating symptom from cause, asking why, and developing the right approach for resolving an issue. Through this process, we tend to hear the same kinds of things, most of which talk about “They.” All the things “They” did that didn’t make sense. All of the decisions “They” made that created the mess we find ourselves in. How things would be different if only “They” understood x, y, z.

Turns out there is no “They.” There is only “We.”

Here’s the secret, though: There is no “They,” at least not like people think.

Our job is to figure out what “We” will do, and usually that includes the group formerly known as “They.”

At the end of last year, we ran a series of sessions for one of our clients. They had spun out of another larger organization at the beginning of the year, and were working to help define and communicate the culture of their new entity. We ran sessions around the globe to share the new culture with regional leadership teams, and to gather their input on the challenges they saw in making the new culture a reality. During one of the debriefs, someone stood up and said, “Who is causing all of these challenges? If you know who it is, please slide a note under my door. I will take care of it.” Everyone laughed. It was

a funny moment. The next morning, during another debrief, he took the microphone again. “Remember when I said you can tell me who is making it hard for us to make this culture real? I woke up this morning, and there was a list of names that had been slipped under my door. It was the attendance list for this meeting. We are the ones who can do something to make this culture a reality.”

If they couldn’t break down the bureaucracy, who could?

It was beautiful. I was a proud, proud facilitator that day. These people were the top 125 people in the region. If they couldn’t influence how work

was done, help break down the legacy bureaucracy, who could? It was time to stop blaming “They” and start working together to develop their path forward. ♦



Don't Go It Alone



by Hamilton Ray

The central theme of David Foster Wallace's work was that Man's greatest struggle in life is to overcome his obsession with Himself. We are navel-gazers, making our way down a road littered with cognitive dissonance and confirmation bias and seeking validation of what we already believe.

This is not necessarily a bad thing. In most walks of life, having that elusive "strong sense of self" is not only comforting and empowering, it is necessary. Lucrative, too. Just ask Steve Wozniak, renowned billionaire and self-described loner, who wrote, "Most inventors and engineers I've met live in their heads. They're almost like artists. In fact, the very best of them are artists. And artists work best

alone. I'm going to give you some advice that might be hard to take. That advice is: Work alone. Not on a committee. Not on a team."

Having that elusive strong sense of self isn't merely comforting and empowering.

At Collective Next, we couldn't disagree more. We certainly recognize the necessity of the individual spark as part of any successful design process. We often employ an exercise where participants are given 30 minutes, uninterrupted, to imagine their individual vision for the future. But the greatest potential for the group

and the individuals is reached when we don't go it alone.

One particular area where collaboration proves most beneficial is in the process of "creation," which is creativity plus execution. The energy and focus that it takes to come up with an idea is generally a very different type of energy and focus that is required to make that idea a reality. When we put people in teams in our sessions, we select to have the right balance of perspectives, experiences, titles and functions. Everyone needs a mirror, a challenger, a contributor, a tester, an inspirer, a temperature-taker. Good ideas also need multiple rounds of iteration to become great ideas. This is a grueling process that takes sustained energy, objectivity, varied per-

spectives, resilience, and dedication. And those are in much greater supply when a group is collaborating to create something than when one is going it alone.

But everyone needs a mirror, a challenger, a tester, an inspirer, a temperature-taker.

Education and learning is another area that is best served by collaboration. A tenet that is core to Collective Next's development and engagement



Don't Go It Alone



by Hamilton Ray

(continued)

work is inspired by this quote from Blaise Pascal: “We are generally the better persuaded by the reasons that we discover for ourselves than by those given to us by others.”

At Collective Next, we live by the power of the team. We never go it alone.

In more basic terms, we believe it when we see it. You know what's better than that? Believing it when a lot of other people see it with you. Better yet, when people see it a little bit differently than you, which helps you to refine and expand your perception of what you are “seeing.” We learn

better, we develop more when we are able to add dimension to our perspectives.

In our Collaborative Learning Programs, we create learning teams of four-to-six people for this very reason. There is a powerful multiplying factor when teams learn together, and this power is necessary. As children, we readily accept new ideas and information and have little difficulty entertaining conflicting and preposterous concepts. As grown-ups, our hard drives are full already. Our neural wagon wheels have established pretty deep ruts in our brains by the time we “mature,” and there is little space for new ideas or information. And this is dangerous! We must learn. We must grow. However, shifting our be-

liefs on what's most important takes a significant mental force — one that is not easily generated alone.

We each have the power to change the course of history, all by ourselves. But even then, doesn't that sound sort of lonely? Regardless of whether you are more effective as an individual or a team, isn't it better to have a team along for the ride?

At Collective Next, we live by the power of the team. We know that the only way to harness the lone genius in all of us is to collaborate with the rest of the geniuses. We never go it alone. ♦



Feed The Animals



by Jimmy Guterman



This blog has been quiet recently because its editor was in over his head as one of the curators of TEDxBoston. With that event behind us, in the weeks to come we're going to share some lessons we learned producing the event and listening to our speakers and performers.

As it turns out, one of the lessons we were reminded of while putting on the show dovetails with our imperative to Feed the Animals.

As curators, we have multiple constituencies. We want the speaker or performer we're working with to do great work, we want the show to meet our personal expectations, and we want the audience to be educated, moved, or entertained by what they witness.

When we go about that, if we're not careful, there's a tendency to make the speakers and performers more conventional than they really are, more "professional," more likely to fit our preconceptions of what they should be doing.

Give them the tools to be themselves and then get out of their way.

And that's exactly the wrong thing to do.

If you invite people to be on your team, it's in part because there's something unique about them. They have specific skills you need, but

they also have an individual way of expressing them. You may want to shape their behavior so they are top contributors, but you also want them to be themselves. Otherwise, why did you invite them?

The trick — be it as a TED curator or as the manager of a team — is to make sure the people you're working with understand the broader goal you're trying to achieve, their part of achieving that goal, while at the same time encouraging them to bring their whole selves to the project and surprise you. To us, Feed the Animals means recognize the people you work with for who they truly are, give them the tools to let them be themselves, and then get out of their way so they can be great. ♦



Ask



by Jimmy Guterman



One of the biggest mistakes you can make in business or in life is to assume what someone will think about what you're going to say or do without making sure. "When you assume," after all, as Felix Unger once said (well, shouted) on *The Odd Couple* ... "you make an ass out of you and me."

When you're a manager, asking questions of your team can be a gift — to them and to you. Asking shows that you recognize that even though you are in charge of the team, you understand that you're part of it as well.

***Asking shows that
you're interested in
sharing the glory.***

You're a team leader — and you're a team member. When you're a team member, asking your fellow members and manager shows that you're motivated, you're committed, and you're interested in sharing the glory, not keeping it all yourself.

***The earlier you turn a
"me" into a "we," the
more likely you all win.***

It's become a business truism that asking for forgiveness is a more effective way to get things done than asking for permission.

Yes, sometimes it makes sense to act first. But we've seen that the earlier you pull someone in to your idea,

the earlier you ask whether your idea makes sense. the earlier you turn a "me" into a "we," the more likely that you'll succeed — and the more likely that everyone around you will feel that they're succeeding along with you. ♦



Be Optimistic



by Jimmy Guterman

It's easy to dismiss optimism in business. Thought leaders advise us to be wary of overoptimistic project leaders and the whole field of positive thinking is ripe for criticism and backlash. Fair enough. It can be just as annoying working alongside Pollyanna as it is collaborating with Cassandra, even if they turn out to be right.

Optimism is essential. What entrepreneur, what innovator, would get out of bed in the morning if he or she didn't think success was possible and desirable? Pessimism can be a motivator in some instances — it's been shown to reduce anxiety — but you can't always count on negativity to pull you through.

It's remarkably easy to get pessimis-

tic. Products and businesses fail every day. For many, pessimism serves as a go-to defense mechanism; it gives you distance from the outcome you're hoping for so it protects you against failure. It may also protect you against success, too, by preventing you from giving your all. Who's going to go the extra mile if he or she is preparing for defeat?

We still cared, very much, but we didn't want anyone to see it.

Most of my career I've been a journalist. Journalism is a profession stuffed with pessimists (even before the financial foundation for publishing began to crack). The self-depre-

cating humor that comes from pessimism protected us, we thought, from feeling worse when the next round of layoffs or next revision of business model came along. We were wrong. It still hurt. It really hurt. All the effort we put into pessimism and self-deprecation created a mask. We still cared, very much, but we didn't want anyone to see it.

If you make jokes about failing, you're more likely to fail. The jokes won't be funny, either.

One of the best pieces of advice I got from a colleague, one I needed to hear but took a long time to truly understand (and still need to be reminded from time to time), was to "default to earnestness." If you make jokes about failing, you're more likely to fail. You're devoting scarce cognitive resources to imagining failure. You probably won't be

as funny as you think you are, either. I know I wasn't. Fear of failing is unavoidable for reasonable people, but expectation of failure (and, even worse, public expression of that expectation of failure) simply gets in the way of getting the work done.

I'm not suggesting empty-headed Pollyanna-style behavior; I'm suggesting that being optimistic even though you're quite familiar with the prospects of failure makes the work more fun, makes working with you more fun, and puts you in a mindset more compatible with success. In the end, it's more trouble to be negative than positive. Why make trouble for yourself? Why not be optimistic and make it easier on yourself and those around you? ♦



"Here's what we want it to look like. We need to make something kind of like a round sign, but with a more square-ish shape. It can't be completely square, though. It should feel modern, but a classic kind of modern. It should be suitable for anyone speaking any language around the world, but don't forget that this is for a domestic audience only. We shouldn't make it too disco. Think of it as Kimye meets the 1975 Cincinnati Reds meets the second season of Twin Peaks. Does that make sense?"

There's a line from composer John Cage that we use a lot here at Collective Next: "Begin anywhere." I love John Cage and all that he left us, and he really lived the idea of "begin anywhere" when it came to his work. He also believed in carrying through with

*There is really no
wrong “answer.”*

- Ambiguity gives you the freedom to ask a lot of questions.
- As Cage knew so well, ambiguity gives you freedom to start anywhere, to make a suggestion, to suggest an anchoring point or idea to get going.
- Ambiguity surprises you. It opens the possibility to be surprised. Who doesn't like a nice surprise?
- Ambiguity helps you to get past pre-conceived notions.

- There is really no wrong “answer” if you are in an ambiguous situation. There are only more or less appropriate responses (and some of those responses can be ambiguous, too).
- You can discover things you might not otherwise.
- Ambiguity teaches you to let go of control, to go with the flow and only worry about controlling what you can.

Exactly. Just go with it. ♦



Nurture, Don't Nuke



by Jimmy Guterman

We've all been there: We're in a meeting and someone has just said The Dumbest Thing We Have Heard in Our Entire Lives. Maybe we think the comment is off-topic. Maybe we think the idea doesn't take into account areas in which the group has already reached consensus. Maybe we think the proposal doesn't respect the time and budget we can devote to the issue at hand. Our responsibility, we think, is to push this out of the way so we can get back to the real work at hand. Just nuke it.

But what might seem off-topic or irrelevant might be spot-on if we let it develop. Business history is full of companies that have failed because they didn't see the next thing coming, whether it was Decca passing on The

Beatles, Excite missing a chance to buy Google for less than \$1 million, or Intel deciding that the iPhone wasn't worth developing for. They nuked the new idea, in large part, because those in power at those companies felt it was too different from their existing model.

New ideas challenge what works so well right now.

Signing The Fab Four, adopting a new search algorithm, or redesigning a chipset all would have required a company to do some rethinking. It wasn't Clayton Christensen-style disruptive innovation, but it would have been a noticeable change of course, either in tactics or strategy.

Decca, Excite, and Intel were all successful companies when they decided not to act on a new opportunity, so they felt it was safe to ignore ideas about how the future might be different because the present was so bright. Why change?

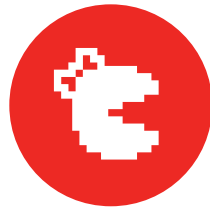
When we see teams decide to nuke new ideas rather than nurture them, it's often because that new idea challenges what works so well right now. But it's when companies are doing well that new ideas can be discussed without desperation having an outsize role in the decision-making. It's when there's time to test, fail, learn, and try again.

Every new idea won't save your company or develop a whole new busi-

ness. Only a rare few do that. Most of the good ideas will likely make your business more effective or efficient. But almost every idea is worth listening to and playing out, at least a bit. It might not take much nurturing to discover what a bad idea nuking would have been. ♦



Make It Fun



by Katia Greene

"In every job that must be done there is an element of fun."

—MARY POPPINS

Those words have stuck with me since the first time I watched *Mary Poppins* and they play a big role in how I approach my day. I've always found that by changing my perspective and looking for a fun way to tackle the tasks at hand, I become far more productive and energized to get things done.

I'm fortunate to work with a creative group of people who want to have fun and breathe life into work. And while not every day can be a party, here are a few ways we like to Make it Fun.

Music in the workspace. It's the easiest way to add fun to your day. It provides background noise to work by and I've always found that it makes time go by faster. Take turns providing a soundtrack for your office or use a service like Pandora to build a station. Not only will it provide a small change to the environment, it will help you get to know a little more about your colleagues.

Celebrate! Even an impromptu celebration will brighten a workplace and get the fun started. For example, don't just say, "Happy Wednesday"; make it a happy Wednesday. Wednesdays in the Collective Next office are always happy because what started as one person going to a food truck for lunch has become an officewide pilgrimage

to the food trucks for Stoked Pizza. (Yes, it's that good.) My favorite part is when everyone gets back from the trucks; we sit in the kitchen and talk over lunch. No computers. Limited calls. All camaraderie.

Dress up as your boss on Halloween.

Games and Competition. Work-related contests can direct attention to a project that otherwise might have been tedious to get done. But try a group activity not related to work. At Collective Next we've had 10-minute Four Square breaks, random roller chair races, Ms. Pac Man contests, just to name a few. Those quick redirects of attention can help refocus energy on a project you might need a break

from. It also gets your blood pumping!

Laugh. You don't need to be Louis C.K., but don't be afraid to get a little silly. Share a funny story about your weekend. Send a crazy birthday greeting or video with costumes and props. Dress up as your boss on Halloween. Laughing helps create memories and bonds with your coworkers. It pulls people together.

There are countless other ways to Make it Fun and I encourage you to incorporate more fun into your day. Just remember, "once you find the fun — SNAP! — The job's a game!" ♦



Step Up



by Jimmy Guterman

We're longtime TED advocates here at Collective Next. We've helped many executives and thought leaders prepare for private and public TED Talks, we've helped run TEDxBoston and supported several other TEDx's, and a few of us have delivered TED-style talks or talks at the actual TED. We find the format to be a great way to share ideas worth spreading.

But TED talks are not enough if you're trying to create change: change in yourself, in your organization, in your world. TED Talks may inspire you, they may motivate you, they may generate an intense emotional reaction, but for the most part they don't make you step up and do anything. (To be fair, TED has a TED-ED initiative focused on education, but it's about spreading

lessons, not developing mastery on the part of the audience.) We work with TED speakers and performers, but here let's look at talks from the point of view of the receiver. What lasting change do you want to create in your audience?

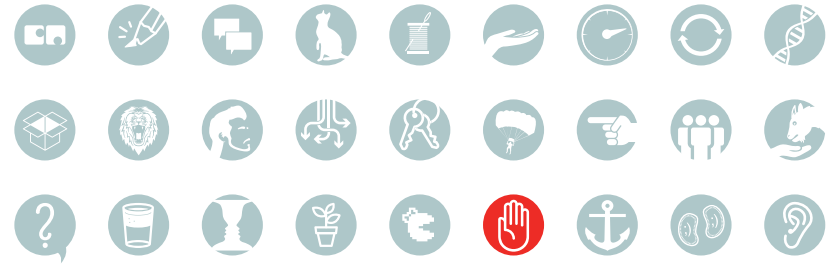
We're a collection of lifelong learners here. We don't just advocate that for our clients and extended network. We're always looking for ways to pick up new skills or sharpen existing ones. There's always a new approach to integrate into our thinking or a new software program to help us turn ideas into reality. But learning about those new approaches and software programs aren't enough; we have to step up and put them into practice. I worked for several years at MIT and I was always impressed by the Institute's commit-

ment to a mind and hand approach in education. After you learn, you have to put that learning to work. In such an approach, learning for its own sake has some value but learning in the service of practical application is far, far better. Why are you learning something if you're not going to do anything with it?

I thought about this recently because I am enrolled in a pair of MOOCs right now, one about creativity and one about thinking in models. I was enjoying them, taking occasional notes on new concepts and reading most of what was on the syllabus, but I was plowing through them passively as if they were ... TED Talks. All I had to do was listen, take things in. I wasn't really forcing myself to do anything. My mind was engaged, but — except for these notes — my hands were just dangling at the ends of my arms. I wasn't participating as fully as I should have. I'd told myself that I wasn't going to do the homework because I have a full-time job and I don't have time. There may be some truth in that, but, even if I wasn't

taking the courses for grades, why was I bothering with the MOOCs at all if I wasn't going to put myself into them? I rethought my commitment, juggled a few responsibilities, and started the assigned work. Both these courses teach what appear to be incredibly useful tools I can use in my daily work. If I just take in the lectures and don't try them out, I'm wasting my time — and, frankly, I'm not giving back to the instructors after they're delivering me so much for free.

This is true is so many parts of work and life. Learning without putting your learning to work is only part of the equation. To get the most out of something and to give the most back, you have to step up and do it. So, if you'll excuse me, I have an exercise I believe I should do right now. ♦



Check Your Anchors



by Jimmy Guterman

Climbing is dangerous. What goes up slowly can come down very quickly. Anchors make it possible for climbers to reach summit as safely as possible. Indeed, anchors are so important to safety that smart ones use multiple anchors. As one how-to puts it: "Two anchors are the minimum for rock climbing. Three anchors won't hurt you either."

Although we hope the dangers aren't as great as climbing, we need anchors in our work, too. As with rock climbing, we're safest and can achieve the most if we pay close attention to multiple types of anchors. In my years working with Collective Next, I've seen our people do spectacular work because they check their anchors repeatedly. Here are the four types of anchors I see them employing:

Preparation anchors. One of the most important lessons I've seen acted on here, day after day, is that there's no such thing as too much preparation, no detail too small to obsess over. Much of our work is facilitating sessions and small/medium/large events for clients. As you might expect, such conferences involve hundreds, sometimes thousands of moving parts. Each of those parts is an opportunity to delight or disappoint. By being ruthless (but kind!) about preparation, we learn what we need to know about the participants, the venue, the programming, and the organization to succeed. This series of posts has been full of preparation anchors: Don't Go It Alone and Make Ambiguity Your Friend to name only two of them.

Kindness anchors. I've seen people here work our clients hard, pushing them until their talk or video or agenda is bulletproof but malleable, able to surmount any last-minute surprise. We do this by treating ideas brutally but treating the individuals expressing those ideas with great kindness. We do hard work here, but it's enjoyable hard work because we treat our clients and each other with kindness. Nurture, Don't Nuke is a good example of this anchor.

We're safest and can achieve the most if we pay close attention to multiple types of anchors.

Topic anchors. We're generalists here, with plenty of experience in many industries but one of our strongest anchors is a desire to learn even more. We help clients develop the best outcomes for their organizations when

we understand their business deeply. Over our 12 years (so far), some of our most satisfying engagements have been with long-term clients who have given us an opportunity to learn their business at an almost atomic level.

Moral anchors. Maybe the ultimate anchor-related question is: Is this the right thing to do? Is it in line with my business's mission and values? My division's? My team's? My personal ones? If we've prepared sufficiently, if we've treated our clients and each other with kindness, if we've become experts on a company and its industry ... then we can ask and answer the deep questions about what the right thing to do is.

What are your anchors? What's most important to you? ♦



Be Contagious



by Jimmy Guterman

It can be fun to watch an idea or an image go viral, whether it being a cat doing something improbable, a striped dress of mysterious color, or something more worthwhile. But don't leave viral communication to people with pets and way too much free time. You can be successfully viral in small settings, as well.

When we at Collective Next enter a situation, we want to present ourselves in a way that is contagious without being fake. If we want a client to feel optimistic about the future, we have to express, authentically, optimism about that future. If we want participants in an exercise to take it seriously but have fun with it, we have to model that balance of sobriety and silliness. Since we're living in the Age

of Viral Content, we scoured the Internet for lessons from viral content that make sense for people who want to be contagious in settings other than YouTube or BuzzFeed. So, to add to your palette, here are three ways you can make ideas and attitudes go viral across your team, throughout your organization, or just in the room that you're in with your colleagues right now.

1. Viral content surfaces things people are interested in but don't necessarily talk about. Much of what becomes viral is a slightly unusual spin on topics that are top of mind, but not top of conversation. They're the subtext of what people talk about all the time, not the text. This can be particularly helpful to know if you're

trying to be contagious about solving a problem in your organization that everyone knows about but few address directly in group forums. If you have a possible solution to a difficult topic, an elephant in the room, people are more likely to pick up on it because it references worries people are having but not yet verbalizing.

2. People want to share viral content. People don't just look at pictures of llamas on the lam; they want to be sure that their friends see it as well. So they share it with their friends, then their friends share it with their friends, and on and on. If you intentionally model a particular behavior in a meeting or a session, that behavior is more likely to spread across the room. It can be physical. If you cross your legs, other are more likely to; if you smile, you are more likely to provoke smiles in others. It can also work in more abstract ways. Bringing up a difficult topic in a non-confrontational way is a proven way

to make others in the room more comfortable addressing that topic.

3. There's not that might work involved. Social networks succeed, in part, because sharing is so easy. Acting when someone else has decided to Be Contagious isn't as easy as pressing a "Like" or "Retweet" button, but having more than one person agreeing that a topic or an approach is worth acting on makes it easier for other people to join in. No one has to do it by himself or herself. As with viral content, everyone is invited.

We hope the changes you want to make in your organization are more weighty than introducing a quiz about which Hilary Duff character you are (yes, that's a real thing). But some of the same criteria that make something viral on the Internet can make what you do more viral at work. You can Be Contagious in a good way. ♦



Listen



by Jimmy Guterman

OK, people. I'm here to share with you one of the hardest lessons I've ever learned at work, and I learned it the hard way. I'm telling you here so you don't have to go through what I went through. Please, people, listen.

Phrased that way, many of you are now primed to actually listen. You can tell, I hope, that I'm being honest with you, that I have a lesson I think might be useful to you, and I'm going to share some personal humiliation to prove my point. Your ears are up.

Not everyone thinks to make that as easy as I'm trying to make it. Sometimes people need help communicating clearly and directly. Sometimes people you work with have so much trouble communicating clearly

and directly that you're tempted to do it for them.

Don't do that. Here's why.

Early in my career, I worked at an editor for a commercial online service. (We were #2 to AOL in that competition, but it was a distant #2. It was like like being the #2 professional golfer during Tiger Woods' prime or, perhaps, the #2 presidential candidate against Vladimir Putin.) For a time, I had a boss who, to my mind, did an ineffective job of communicating what he wanted done or why. For months, we would have weekly meetings during which, again to my mind, he was unable to articulate what was necessary. He would start sentences and then be quiet for what seemed

like long periods of time (30 seconds of silence in a 1:1 meeting can feel like a long time to someone — and these pauses were longer than that). After his pause, he'd go on to a new idea without finishing the previous one. After a while, I would wait a few seconds after he turned silent and start finishing his sentences.

Sometimes people need help communicating clearly and directly.

This went on for three meetings. I felt good about how things were going. I was participating in developing strategy, I thought, and since I was the one verbalizing what I needed

to do, I felt I was doing important things. And then, during one meeting, I stepped in during a break to finish one of my boss's sentences, as usual, and he shouted, "Give me a damn second for once, will you?! I know what I want and I will get to what I need to get to!"

I was, at once, surprised, a little scared, and extremely embarrassed. I realized immediately how arrogant and presumptuous I had been. I was waiting for the pauses to arrive so I could insert what I wanted. I wasn't helping. I was interrupting and I was disrespectful. He was having trouble



Listen



by Jimmy Guterman

(continued)

verbalizing and I was exacerbating it. Most of all, I wasn't listening, just waiting for my chance to show off.

We want leaders who know what they want and are able to share that and help others do it.

If you're in a leadership position, there's a good chance that a big reason you're there is because of what you say when it's your turn to do the saying. Fine. We want leaders who know what they want and are able to share that and help others do it. But if you aspire to be a leader, you can't interject yourself all the time. Unless

you're working for a one-person company and never have to deal with clients, contractors, suppliers, or other human beings, you're never going to succeed if you're more in love with the sound of your own voice, as I was, than what you might learn from others in the room. You may think you're the smartest person in the room, and you might be (although you're less likely to be the smartest person in the room if you think you are). But it's highly unlikely that you're the only person in the room trying to add any value. Different people have different ways of speaking, so you have to develop different ways of listening. Just as a leader adapts her communications to the needs of her audience, a smart listener keeps in mind not only what someone else is saying

but also what he is trying to say. Listening doesn't only mean focusing on what people are saying. It also means recognizing what people are leaving out. If you pay attention, you can hear subtext as well as text. Then, when it's your turn, you can add value.

Different people have different ways of speaking, so you have to develop different ways of listening.

I didn't realize this right away when my long-ago boss scolded me. It's been 19 years since then and I still cringe a bit at how I treated him. But listening is a skill you can devel-

op with time and practice. I'm not always perfect. I still interrupt every now and then when I'm not listening hard enough. But when I listen before I open my mouth, I'm much more likely to succeed. You are, too. ♦



