Have you ever thought about...

...whether you are a good leader?

Get information flowing in every direction rather then only downwards from your office.

Step out of your ivory tower to be a good leader

DON'T BE AN IVORY-TOWER MANAGER, appearing occasionally to dispense advice and make proclamations.

Instead, lead from the middle by getting information flowing in every direction throughout your organization.

Follow these principles:

• **Talk nonstop.** Ivory-tower bosses hoard information. Managers who lead from the middle communicate early and often. As one manager puts it, "If you're not sick and tired of communicating, you aren't doing enough of it."

• **Encourage ideas.** Ivory-tower leaders believe ideas must come from the top to be any good. Leaders in the trenches know good ideas come from everywhere. Even if a person's idea is impractical or unworkable, always thank him in person for speaking up.

• **Don't give orders.** Leaders in the trenches don't want blind compliance; they want people to be enthusiastic about carrying out their vision. Instead of just giving orders, explain why you want people to do something.

• **Stamp out rumours.** Ivory-tower leaders are too isolated to care about the office grapevine. Listen for rumours and keep speculation under control by letting people know what's going on.

• **Keep it simple.** Insecure managers use evasive language and often clutter their statements with buzzwords. Instead, speak in a simple language everyone can understand.

• **Be accessible.** You have to be available to lead from the middle. In the 1970s, Bill Veeck, the owner of American baseball's Chicago White Sox, literally removed the door from his office on his first day. Soon after, he got rid of the walls, too. **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Manager's Edge, *as adapted from* THE PARADOX OF POWER, *by Pat Williams*

Words of Wisdom

"I like pigs. Dogs look up to us. Cats look down on us. Pigs treat us as equals."

— Sir Winston Churchill

Stop making noise — start making sense

You don't have to aspire to the level of eloquence of F Scott Fitzgerald or William Shakespeare to be an effective communicator.

EVERY DAY, AMBITIOUS MANAGERS sit in offices and conference rooms, shifting paradigms, thinking outside the box, and explaining why they missed trends that were not yet on their radar screens.

That certainly *sounds* impressive. But every time I encounter language like this, and I encounter a lot of it as I scan the memos, mission statements, and reports that cross my desk, I think to myself, "Yes, there is certainly a lot of sound and fury here, but does any of it really *mean* anything?"

Increasingly, I fear, the answer is *NO*.

What does it really mean, after all, to "shift a paradigm" or "think outside the box"? These common phrases are little more than exhortations to "think creatively." And if something isn't "on your radar screen," isn't it the same thing as admitting that you haven't been paying attention?

Could it be that we in the business world resort to this use of inflated verbiage to make up for a paucity of new ideas?

Is it possible that we reflexively just crank out memos, mission statements, and presentations full of jargon when we don't have anything important to say?

That may indeed be the case, says James O'Rourke, director of the Fanning Centre for Business Communication at the University of Notre Dame's Mendoza College of Business in Notre Dame, Ind.

"Phrases like these are overused to the point of being meaningless," he explains. "People resort to this because they haven't really thought carefully about what they want to say.

"When I see these kinds of phrases used repeatedly in business writing and speaking, that's a signal to me that the writer or the speaker hasn't thought things through."

Deborah Barrett, director of the MBA Communications Programmme at Rice University's Jesse H. Jones Graduate School of Management in Houston, says, "Writing clearly and concisely and saying something meaningful takes time and energy. "People rely on language like this because they get lazy."

But is this necessarily bad? After all, when you use a phrase like 'thinking outside the box,' everyone in the room knows what you mean, don't they?

Maybe not, says Barrett. She recalls a time when she was called in to help a major company craft a vision statement. "We started out with what looked like a simple, straightforward statement. At least the executives involved thought it was.

But I saw the jargon embedded in it. So we got together in one room and started looking at the statement and every single one of the executives realized that they had a different interpretation.

It took half a day to go through that one sentence and beat out the jargon and get it down to meaningful words, a statement that everyone in the room could look at and say, 'That's it! That's what we mean.'"

If you want to prevent misinterpretation, it is essential that you have a clear idea of what you are trying to say and then to express your thoughts with equal clarity.

It is especially important in a global economy, where your audience may lack the cultural context necessary to attach meaning to empty boxes, radar screens, or the sports metaphors that are commonly used in modern business communications.

According to Barrett, another trend contributing to the proliferation of empty prose and catch phrases has resulted in a breakdown in the formality of business communications. "People have become careless ," she notes.

"They tend to be breezy and informal in their email, and that's carrying over into more formal writing. People are beginning to think that the abbreviations they use in email, and even some of the symbols they use, are appropriate."

This style makes it easy to churn out a great deal of prose during the average workday.

However, when the chummy tone of email carries over into important memos and presentations, you run the risk of wasting the audience's time and conveying messages that are vague and confusing.

"An occasional bromide or hackneyed phrase is not necessarily lethal," says O'Rourke, "but it can be. It may be a warning signal to the listener or the reader that there is less here than they had hoped for."

Or as Barrett puts it, "If the writing isn't clear, odds are the thinking isn't clear."

When their eyes glaze over, nothing you say will show up on their radar screens, and you might as well be talking to the wall. **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Dayton Fandray is Continental Airlines' "MIND OF THE MANAGER" *columnist.*

LEARN THESE SIMPLE AND NATURAL WAYS to STOP negative thoughts and reduce stress, worry, tension and stomach acid buildup.

You'll stop the negative thought AND step into a more powerful and pleasant place as a result.

Listen to all of your thoughts for a day. Don't try to change anything, just observe when a negative thought comes into your mind.

Select one really persistent thought to work on, eg., worry about paying bills. Ignore the other thoughts for a while.

Each time that thought comes into your mind, say to yourself, "STOP!" You may have to do this 5, 10 or 20 times before the thought goes away.

Notice what's happening when you 'push your STOP button.' Does the thought stop or persist? Does it diminish or seem smaller?

If thinking STOP doesn't work at first, try saying STOP out loud. That's right, shout it out. Notice what's happening when you say STOP out loud.

If saying STOP out loud doesn't work at first, use hand signals for STOP. You know what that looks like. You command it to STOP like a traffic cop does, as if to say: "I said STOP, you numbskull." And mean it —just like a stern cop.

Notice what you are thinking now, too. Are you laughing? Are you embarrassed at talking to yourself out loud and playing traffic cop? Yes? No? Whatever your reaction, try to concentrate on what you're thinking as you do these exercises.

While you are doing these exercises, notice which one works best. Does one method work better for different types of thoughts?

Does the traffic cop work best for worrisome thoughts? Does thinking STOP work best for what you call petty thoughts?

Now, use all three methods and find the one that works best for you in any and all situations. Use these methods for thought-interruptions and you will own a new skill. **BAI**

Chris Nabavi

The view from where I sit

How did we survive?

IF YOU WERE BORN AFTER 1980, this does not apply to you.., so go away!

Kids of today are wrapped in cotton wool......... Read on.

If you lived as a child in the 50's, 60's or 70's, looking back, it's hard to believe that we have lived as long as we have...

As children, we would ride in cars with no seat belts or air bags.

Our cots were covered with bright coloured lead-based paint. We had no childproof lids on medicine bottles, doors, or cupboards, when we rode our bikes we had no helmets.

We drank water from the garden hose and not from a bottle.

We would spend hours building go-carts out of scraps and then ride down the hill, only to find out we forgot the brakes.

After running into the bushes a few times we learned to solve the problem.

We would leave home in the morning and play all day, as long as we were back when the streetlights came on. No one was able to reach us all day.

No mobile phones.

We got cut and broke bones and broke teeth, and there were no law suits from these accidents. They were accidents. No one was to blame, but us.

Remember accidents?

We had fights and punched each other and got black and blue and learned to get over it.

We ate cakes, bread and butter, and drank cordial, but we were never got overweight...we were always outside playing. We shared one drink with four friends, from one bottle and no one died from this.

We did not have Playstations, Nintendo 64, X-Boxes, video games, 65channels on pay TV, video tape movies, surround sound, personal mobile phones, Personal Computers, Internet chat rooms ... we had friends.

We went outside and found them. We rode bikes or walked to a friend's home and knocked on the door, or rung the bell, or just walked in and talked to them. Imagine such a thing.

Without asking a parent! By ourselves!

Out there in the cold cruel world! Without a guardian — how did we do it?

We made up games with sticks and tennis balls, and ate worms, and although we were told it would happen, we did not put out very many eyes, nor did the worms live inside us forever.

Footy and netball had tryouts and not everyone made the team. Those who didn't, had to learn to deal with disappointment...

Some pupils weren't as smart as others so they failed an exam and were held back to repeat the same year. Tests were not adjusted for any reason.

Our actions were our own. Consequences were expected. No one to hide behind.

The idea of a parent bailing us out if we broke a law was unheard of. They actually sided with the law — imagine that!

This generation has produced some of the best risk-takers and problem-solvers and inventors, ever. The past 50 years has been an explosion of innovation and new ideas. We had freedom, failure, success and responsibility… and we learned how to deal with it all.

And you're one of them. Congratulations!

You, and others had the luck to grow up as kids, before lawyers and government regulated our lives... *for our own good.* **BAI**

Effective managing

Managers need to make mental health their business

RESEARCH PUBLISHED by the antistigma campaign MIND OUT FOR MENTAL HEALTH and THE WORK FOUNDATION reveals that mental health problems in the workplace are widespread but that most line managers are ill-equipped to deal with them.

To help address this issue, MIND OUT FOR MENTAL HEALTH has launched THE LINE MANAGERS' RESOURCE — A PRACTICAL GUIDE TO MANAGING AND SUPPORTING MENTAL HEALTH IN THE WORKPLACE.

The resource gives advice on spotting signs of distress, taking early action to prevent problems escalating, supporting an employee who is off sick and planning a successful return to work.

Mental health issues are a reality in the workplace. Two thirds of employees (66%) report that they, or a work colleague, have experienced a problem and 70% of line managers have managed a member of staff with a diagnosed or suspected mental health problem.

Although almost half (46%) of all employees said that they would go to their line manager if they were affected by mental health issues, worryingly only 4% thought their manager would be able to provide practical support.

'Learners' or 'novices'

Line managers recognised their lack of knowledge about mental health, with two thirds (66%) rating themselves as 'learners' or 'novices'. Lack of information was also acknowledged to be a problem.

Three quarters (75%) of line managers don't think, or don't know, that their organisations have adequate policies or procedures to deal with mental health. **BAI**

EMAIL — THERE IS NO GETTING AWAY FROM IT and without doubt it has many positive benefits to offer business.

But a new survey has shown that 66% of managers from the UK private and public sectors are finding email is controlling their business day. They receive too many emails to cope with, many of them are irrelevant and this is causing considerable workplace stress.

TeamIT Training conducted the survey throughout 2002 while delivering their Effective Email Management seminar to a range of clients in the financial services, retail and public sectors. Clients included High street banks, department stores and retailers, manufacturing companies, professional practices and local authorities and NGOs.

Their pre- and post-course research revealed some of the reasons why UK managers are finding their email hard to manage.

The pre-course survey showed:

• 87% of managers felt they receive too many emails;

• 97% receive emails that just waste their time;

• 60% reported feeling stressed at some time by email, with 21 % often feeling stressed;

• 91 % admitted they sent emails when they could telephone.

Overall, 66% of managers in the survey felt that email was controlling their day and as a result they had difficulty prioritising their workload.

"These results reveal a fundamental problem, not with email technology, but with organisational attitudes towards it," said Bob Hallewell, Director at TeamIT Training.

All the managers completed a post-course questionnaire two weeks later to assess how they were now handling their email.

The results showed, on average:

• 16% drop in the number of irrelevant emails received;

• 34% drop in the number of times people checked their emails;

• 24% drop in the amount of time managers spent each day using and managing their email traffic. `BAI`

How to minimise conflict in a family business

by Scott E. Friedman

A business — with its many pressures and the demand for constant decision-making — is a perfect environment to trigger dispute.

NO FAMILY EXISTS WITHOUT CONFLICT. It's just a matter of degree. Some families are so stricken with conflict that communication completely breaks down.

Other families experience more normal forms of conflict and resolve it constructively.

The same applies to family businesses. If families are prone to conflict, a business — with its many pressures and the demand for constant decision-making — is a perfect environment to trigger dispute.

Trap: Conflicts can become so severe that seven out of 10 family companies are unable to make it from the founding generation to the second generation. By the third generation, nine out of 10 have failed. *But it doesn't have to be that way...*

Plan ahead for conflict

Most disputes can be avoided by planning and consensus building *in advance* of the occurrence of actual disputes over, say, an important expenditure or a major personnel move.

The process begins with good family communication. This requires skill and talent as well as an understanding of financial statements.

Just as not everyone looking at a cashflow analysis can understand its real significance, most people don't know how to listen or communicate effectively without some expert guidance.

Common problems

• Stifling feelings instead of venting them, causing them to explode inappropriately later.

• Failing to confront family members for fear of offending them or not showing family members the same courtesy and respect shown strangers.

• Triangulation — communicating your thoughts or opinions to a third party instead of the person who's directly involved.

Example: If a father and his child have a dispute in the office, they go home and complain to their spouse or parent, instead of first trying to resolve the issue themselves.

Solution: Set up a *family council* that is separate from the organization of the business.

Purpose: To facilitate family communication and dialogue ... as well as to decide well in advance how certain questions will be handled when they inevitably occur in the business.

Examples...

• What will be the prerequisites for coming into the family business: Age ... gender ... education ... outside experience ... family relationship?

• What is the compensation policy for family employees?

• What happens when a family member marries ... divorces?

• What if someone decides he/she wants to cash out?.

• Who will succeed in the event of the founder's death?

• How will estate taxes be paid?

• How can disagreements be most constructively resolved?

• How will family members who are inactive in the business receive an interest in the "family wealth"?

Creating the family council

Family councils can be structured in a number of different ways. But membership must be open and inclusive of, say, everyone in the family over age 21.

This is much different from the board of directors of the business, which is composed of both family representatives and qualified nonfamily advisers.

Helping: In the beginning, consider using a professional facilitator, such as a trained psychologist, to get family communication going.

Meetings should be on a regular basis, perhaps quarterly, so that everyone knows when he will have a chance to be heard.

Though some families may prefer to meet informally, it's usually helpful to have some structure with a designated leader, an agenda of the subject matter to be covered and pre-circulation of relevant background information.

At the first family council meeting, it's useful if the founder reviews the history of the business and how it has evolved over the years.

Recalling the original vision can serve as the basis for agreeing on a current mission statement that spells out the philosophy and expectations of all the family owners.

This simple mission statement can be used to enhance consensus and emphasize family values.

The mission statement also helps the family focus on its own unique formula for business success.

Developing the family charter

Think of the family charter as a sort of constitution for the family business. It can set the ground rules for entering, participating in and remaining in the family business.

Many charters include specific provisions about what education and experience are required to join the company, how titles and authority will be determined, how job performance will be evaluated and what consequences will flow from inadequate job performance.

Important: All agreements should be written down. If an agreement can't be set down in writing, it needs further discussion.

A written document can serve as a guide for the family over generations and prevent disputes from arisingg or help resolve them quickly and peacefully. But you must also have in place some mechanism for reviewing and revising agreements as times and circumstances change over the years.

Dispute resolution tactics

Many disputes can be avoided by spelling out in the charter what levels of expenditure require preapproved levels of agreementsuch as a majority, supermajority or

Reasons why the present is perfect

"THE PRESENT IS PERFECT" is a frequently heard saying among people working on self-improvement.

It is sometimes difficult to explain just how this is meant when we are faced with a world in which war, poverty, intolerance and injustice so often occur.

Here, then, are some ways in which the present may be seen as perfect.

It should be noted that this does not mean that the future cannot be better.

• It is the turning point between the past and the future, the opportunity to change course, the moment of choice.

• It is the consequential result of our past choices and environments, and it offers us a time for closure on what we wish to put behind us.

• Just as the acorn contains the DNA, the design for the full potential of the future oak tree, so our present contains the full potential of our future.

• If the present is not comfortable, is not what we would like it to be, then it offers us the discomfort as a way to identify how we want our future to be different.

This identification can be the first step toward making those changes.

• Even if our present is comfortable, and contains no dissonance or problems, it still contains the lessons for whatever growth and changes we choose to make so that our future will be even better.

It is the only time we have. **BAI**

Words of Wisdom

"We are at the very beginning of time for the human race. It is not unreasonable that we grapple with problems. But there are tens of thousands of years in the future. Our responsibility is to do what we can, learn what we can, improve the solutions, and pass them on."

— Richard Feynman

Problem solving
Involve colleagues to solve a tough problem

When stuck for an idea, borrow the brains of others to provide fresh insights on problem solving

NEW EYES SEE POSSIBILITIES where you've got blindspots, so involve your colleagues in solving tough problems.

They'll see answers you've overlooked. When designing Word for Windows, for example, Dean Abamovitch wanted to make Word's line-drawing capabilities easy enough for users to make borders around paragraphs, tables, and pictures.

After puzzling alone for days in his office, he asked a colleague for help.

"Customers really want to make borders around their paragraphs," he explained and drew some lines with a box around them on a piece of paper.

"Or, they want shaded paragraphs, or no border at all." He continued to draw.

"Plus, there are all these different kinds of lines they might want: thick, thin, dashed, doubled." He added the lines to his picture.

"Why don't you just show them that picture and they can click on the things they want?" his colleague asked.

"Huh?" Abramovitch squinted. "Oh yeah! Wow!"

All of a sudden he saw a solution that had been in front of him all along.

"Layers of complicated commands disappeared," recalls Julie Bick, product manager for Microsoft Word. "When users choose 'Borders and Shading' from the Word menu, they are presented with the same simple visual choices that were drawn on a piece of paper that day."

She and others at Microsoft routinely do the same thing. When stuck for an idea, Bick asks a few people if she can "borrow their brain" for an informal brainstorming session. She lays out her objectives and constraints, and "soon we'd all be yelling and tossing around thoughts.

"I ended up with more high-quality ideas because the team members inspired one another. They felt valuable for having been called on to help, and if I ended up using their ideas, I gave them credit for it. This made them all the more eager to help next time." **BAI**

SOURCENOTE: Julie Bick, ALL I REALLY NEED TO KNOW IN BUSINESS I LEARNED AT MICROSOFT: INSIDER STRATEGIES TO HELP YOU SUCCEED

Productivity
Office environment can dictate success

ACCORDING TO A RECENT SURVEY, UK employers should not underestimate the importance of the office environment in raising productivity and improving employee satisfaction.

While today's workforce is undoubtedly looking for greater flexibility in the workplace to achieve a better work/life balance, the physical aspects of the working environment must not be over-looked.

Particular findings of the survey include:

• The realisation that today's working environment must contain spaces that cater for different requirements, i.e. quiet areas to concentrate on complex tasks, informal areas for brainstorming and knowledge sharing.

• The role of open plan environments to encourage good internal communications and the importance of creating a positive impression on visitors.

Thirty-eight per cent of respondents are concerned about the impression their office environment creates, while just under half of managers are consulted on decisions about their workspace. **BAI**

Conflict in a family business (concluded)

unanimous agreement of family members.

The same can be done for non-financial issues.

Still, no matter how effective a family's charter is, conflicts of some sort will inevitably crop up.

Key: View dispute resolution as a process instead of an event. The idea is to resolve disputes before they erupt into irreparable family hostility.

Again, the process begins with good communication.

Use family council meetings as an opportunity to flush out and resolve possible conflicts.

Example: By explaining at family council why a certain expenditure is necessary to meet customer demands, it's possible to head off complaints from shareholders who'd rather put that money toward dividends or higher salaries.

For continuing disputes, the charter might provide for a vote by one or more disinterested outside advisers or directors.

Negotiating a dispute through a trusted family adviser is the best, most confidential, flexible and inexpensive way to settle a problem.

Only if that fails should the family try formal mechanisms, such as mediation, arbitration or litigation.

SOURCENOTE: Based on an interview with Scott E. Friedman, partner, Lippes, Silverstein, Mathias & Wexler LLP, an American law firm concentrating on business and corporate matters. He is author of THE SUCCESSFUL FAMILY BUSINESS and a diagnostic family assessment tool, "THE FAMILY BUSINESS SCORECARD."

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