

Planning Possibilities

News & views brought to you by Michelle Coussens

Welcome to my March 2019 Issue!

I am writing this newsletter on the first day of spring. I have never so consciously looked forward to this calendar marker as I have this year. Either I am growing old and weary of cold weather, or this has been a burdensome winter— or likely some of both.

As the weather starts to improve, my energy level does so, also. That means spring cleaning, both literally and figuratively. Just like I clean out my home and bring fresh air into it, I similarly do so with my work, cleansing my email box, my physical and electronic folders, scrubbing spreadsheets holding client and contact information, and resetting my organizational diligence. How are YOU spring cleaning your business?

Michelle



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Planning for Good Decisions

PLAN B CONSULTING MISSION STATEMENT

To assist organizations in becoming more effective and efficient through practical business planning, resulting in meaningful and measurable outputs, outcomes, and impact.

Prepare
Communicate
Execute

Project managers are usually generalists. They may decide who performs each task but exercise little direct control over specific work. They focus on what needs to be done, when it needs to be done, and what resources are required to get the job done. They also often work on several projects simultaneously.

Learn more to help you plan for the right project managers on page 2.

Planning for the Right Project Managers

Understanding what is required of project managers can help in determining and anticipating what project managers to seek for given situations. In addition to those who already manage projects, depending on the situation, you may also want to consider involving others who have not managed projects before. Small short-term projects can help train or “ramp up” new project managers. As they gain more experience, they become more prepared for the larger, longer-term projects. In fact, in today’s work environment, experience as a project manager is often seen as a desirable step on the corporate ladder. Project managers take responsibility for planning, implementing, and completing projects, beginning with the job of getting things started. And, often a PM (project manager) might work on several projects simultaneously.

Project managers have to be able to seek and manage resources given that budgets are often in actuality inadequate. Resource trade-offs have to be considered, and crises can occur that also require special resources. Most project workers are borrowed from various other departments or functions, and that means that the project manager has to be adept at negotiating with respective functional managers for needed and desired workers.

As you review your upcoming strategies, goals, objectives, and initiatives, factor in who to tap for managing associated projects, as well as who to introduce to project management to develop that bench strength for the future.

Planning Predicaments: When to Walk Away

*Where
planning
concepts
meet
reality*

I was teaching an ethics seminar this week, and in addition to focusing on our outward behavior, I also reminded everyone that ethics is also about what we put up with from others. And, that line might be different for each of us. If others behave in a way that offends us, we have the right to disengage. However, that can become a difficult and complicated decision when we rely on them for our income and our careers.

Where is the line for you? What are you willing to put up with? How do you stand up for others who are being subjected to unethical situations?

Online Plug of the Month



There’s a website that provides information and resources to help people learn and develop personal and professional skills for everyday life. And, you can subscribe to their newsletter and have such tips come into your email box.

In the most recent issue, they discuss tips for dealing with stress, as well as the relationship between stress and diet. And, they also discuss workplace stress, in particular.

Sign up for their free online newsletter at:

<https://www.skillsyouneed.com/>

Communication Corner

We often think of communication as our outward efforts, but it also includes the intake of people and things around us. I recently taught a course where we discussed environmental elements that foster an atmosphere for concentrated thinking. One of the elements noted was music. It has been well-documented for quite some time that music not only can affect our moods, our concentration, and our recall, but can actually affect how we interpret information.

A study published by Teresa Lesiuk in 2005 measured the effects of listening to music on work performance. Its results indicated that work quality and time to completion was heightened while listening to music. And, perhaps even more compelling was the observation that the associated positive feelings evoked by music also positively influenced creativity. The author noted that “When music evokes a pleasant mood and an increased arousal state, participants perform better on nonmusical tasks. Thus, there is support for an increase in creative problem solving...”. So, get out those earbuds and hit “play”!



Book Banter

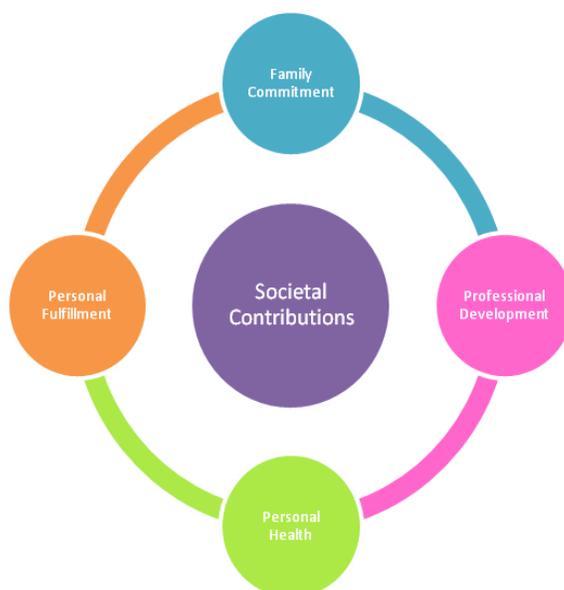
Applied Empathy: The New Language of Leadership, by Michael Ventura, Touchstone, 2018.

As the book starts out, “Empathy is a squishy word. Sometimes it’s confused with sympathy or misinterpreted as ‘being nice’. That isn’t empathy. Empathy is about understanding. Empathy lets us see the world from other points of view and helps us form insights that can lead us to new and better ways of thinking, being, and doing... Applied empathy is about seeking and achieving the benefits of “taking on others’ perspectives in the context of our professional lives” (p. 1).

I found this book useful in many ways, and certainly also in relation to planning. Here are just a few of the notes I took:

- “T-shaped” people are those who have both depth in an area of expertise (the vertical line), as well as the ability to operate cross-functionally (the horizontal line). “Leaders in many different industries were saying that most, if not all, workers in the twenty-first century need to have some sort of ‘T-shaped’ profile if they expect to be competitive in the job market of the future” (p. 39).
- There are seven empathic personas to incorporate into perspectives: the Sage, the Inquirer, the Convener, the Alchemist, the Confidant, the Seeker, and the Cultivator. In combination, this means being fully in the moment, questioning the status quo, anticipating the needs of others, experiment, listen to observe and absorb, take risks, and develop ideas in an intentional manner.
- There are “four key tensions that consistently emerge as stumbling blocks and can slow down the change process... objective versus subjective decision-making; top-down versus bottom-up culture; human-centered versus ecosystemic thinking; passive versus proactive leadership” (p. 110).
- In considering objective versus subjective decision-making: “What is your organization’s comfort with ambiguity? How often are facts and data used to inform decisions? Is creativity a central part of your company’s DNA? How is personal and company-wide success measured? How much is experimentation tolerated or encouraged?” (p. 134)
- “What sort of leadership do you bring to the table with your colleagues? Your department? Your organization? How is feedback used as part of personal development at your company? When and why do company employees receive communication from senior leadership? Does the overall organization consider individual employee growth to be important? In your organization, is leadership assigned, earned, or both?” (p. 135).

Personally Yours



What does the traffic light say?

I was catching up with a good friend this week, and she noted that she feels like she is currently experiencing that rare moment when her personal and professional lives are both going well at the same time. It also makes her wonder when “the other shoe” is going drop, however.

It reminded me of something I do periodically. I evaluated each of the areas in my diagram to the left to essentially take a conscious and deliberate pulse on how things are going. Harkening back to the days of kindergarten, you can think of the red light, yellow light, green light signals. A green light signifies that you are happy with how things are going— they are on track with or exceeding your expectations. A yellow light conveys some concern that things may be trending downward or potentially getting off track. And, of course, red indicates that things are off the rails and require some kind of attention and correction.

I try to consider this once a month (in sync with writing my newsletter, which makes that easy!). Currently, I have three areas with green lights, but two with yellow. What do your traffic lights show for you?

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- Customized market research and competitive intelligence analysis
- Strategic facilitation of the planning process
- Board retreat facilitation

This newsletter is intended to provide useful information but should not be construed as legal or financial fact, advice, or opinion.

Coming in April...

- * **The role and influence of culture on project management**
- * **Book discussion of Clear Thinking: A Practical Introduction, by Hy Ruchlis with Sandra Oddo, 1990, Prometheus Books.**
- * **And more!**



Have an idea or comment to share? Have a topic suggestion or planning question? Send it in! I would love to hear from you!

Be My Guest/Reader Feature

Have a planning success or horror story? Have some tips for others? I would love to feature you. If you are interested in being included in a future newsletter, let me know if you would like to write a guest column or be interviewed.

UPCOMING PUBLIC TRAINING & SPEAKING EVENTS

- * **04/18/19-04/19/19: Critical Thinking, American Management Association, Chicago, IL, register at <http://www.amanet.org>.**
- * **05/09/19-05/10/19: Strategic Thinking, American Management Association, Chicago, IL, register at [amanet.org](http://www.amanet.org).**
- * **05/20/19-05/22/19: Strategy Execution, American Management Association, Chicago, IL, register at [amanet.org](http://www.amanet.org).**
- * **06/10/19-06/11/19: Critical Thinking, American Management Association, Chicago, IL, register at [amanet.org](http://www.amanet.org).**
- * **08/21/19: Operational Strategies for Organizational Success, New Orleans, LA, register at <http://www.neighborworks.org/training-services/training-professional-development>**

Email me for details!