



Affinity News

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Greetings:

We all like to be nostalgic once in a while. Reminiscence is a good thing to do now and then. I think this winter has cured most of us from starting the story: remember when it used to start snowing in November and the streets never cleared until March?

I hope you are having a good start to 2008. This is the time we move from the darkest part of the year to a time of new beginnings. The featured story in this issue focuses on the little things that make a big difference. It was inspired by a great set of music I heard recently. If you'd like to know more about the musicians featured in the story go to:

<http://www.fred-and-ethel.com/index.htm>

As always, I hope things are well in your world and you are in a position to have a positive impact on those things you know are important.

Mission, Methods & Tools:

The mission of Affinity By Design, LLC is to help organizations meet their goals by overcoming obstacles. The method for accomplishing this mission is the intentional bringing together of a community of people to pursue a common interest based upon mutual trust and understanding. The primary tools

employed by Affinity By Design, LLC are founded in the disciplines of group facilitation, Systems Theory and project management.

Feature: Just a Cymbal?

I recently had the opportunity to see Fred and Ethel perform their special blend of folk/rock music. Fred and Ethel is the pseudonym for Tom Janezic and Jude Kinnear. Their music reflects that spontaneous quality that only comes from great experience and meticulous attention to subtle detail.

I have always found a certain beauty in precision. The beauty of design is seen in such things as the Versailles Gardens, a Formula 1 race car, or the unique shape of a snow flake. Not surprisingly, I hold a special place for well crafted music. I am especially fascinated by people who can make great music with nothing more than the combination of voices and acoustic instruments.

As I listened to Fred and Ethel's set I found it interesting to hear Kinnear's use of a cymbal. The cymbal was not part of a drum kit, just a small cymbal on its own stand. Periodically Kinnear would hit the cymbal at just the right moment in a song. What struck me as most interesting was how it was determined a lightly tapped cymbal was needed at just that moment in that song. We now know why Janezic and Kinnear were the ones on stage and I was in the audience!

Lessons Learned:

If I were hauling equipment for Fred and Ethel, I'd probably argue the cymbal was unnecessary to the set of music I listened to. As a percentage of the notes played in the set, the cymbal was used only marginally. I'm sure a multi-dimensional evaluation by audience members would have rated the performance as "Excellent" either with or without the inclusion of the cymbal. It would seem the marginal effort to haul this piece of equipment far exceeds its marginal value. Yet the cymbal was included in the musical arrangements and hauled to and from the show. Once again, a reminder of why I was not on stage!

If I sat down with Janezic and Kinnear to talk about their music (Wouldn't that be cool!) I suspect they would find fault with my reasoning. The performance measures I used are likely different than theirs. There is clearly a different sense of value added in play here.

The inherent tension between making music and equipment management are similar to the tension between organizational mission and efficiency of operations. The challenge (and opportunity) lies in resolving this tension.

Applying The Lessons:

It is important to regularly take a critical look at the balance between the art of delivering organizational mission and the effective use of organizational resources. We tend to think in terms of doing more with less these days. We shouldn't forget the power to make big differences through the addition of small amounts of resources.

Unlike Fred & Ethel, an organization is orchestrated by many individuals with many points of view. Here are a few ideas on making the best use of the voices playing in your group:

- Ask everyone: The idea of "Management by Walking Around" got lots of press, but what about asking some of the others who walk around your organization? The mailroom person, receptionist, and maintenance people all have an opportunity to observe a good cross-section of the organization.
- Ask "Why" five times: Repeatedly asking "Why?" uncovers a deeper understanding of the motivation behind decisions. Asking about why the cymbal is important will reveal a deeper understanding of music. On the other hand, you may remember the deeper understanding of why it is so important to cut the end off the ham: Great-grandma's pan was too small to hold a full-sized ham!
- Ask: What one thing, that cannot be changed, would make a big impact if it were different? This question often reveals incorrect assumptions about the inflexibility of policies and procedures.

Add your comments:

The story above has been published on the Affinity By Design blog. You can become a part of the story by going to: < <http://affinitybd.blogspot.com/>>. You'll also find web-only content there.

Speakers Corner:

Dan Lococo regularly speaks to groups on a wide variety of topics. Here are a few of the presentations Dan has done for groups in the recent past.

- Vision to Action: On how to move from high-level goals to the small steps it takes to get the job done.
- Having Skin in the Game: A light hearted look at the difference between volunteering and volunteering to navigate for a blind driver in a race car.
- Living our Spirit: On the ways we give ourselves to the world.
- Learning from Plan B: On the gifts that come when things don't go as expected. (Co-presented with Helen Lococo)

If your group or organization needs a speaker, let Dan know how he could help.

How Affinity By Design, LLC can help:

Is it time to do some analysis of what's effective and what's not? This would be a great time to look at how your organization can bring its best to the table. You might be surprised at what you'd find. You'll also be surprised at how Affinity By Design, LLC can help.

Dan Lococo brings many years of experience in business process analysis, finance management, and group facilitation to Affinity By Design, LLC.

There are a number of ways your organization can take advantage of these skills and experience as it becomes more effective in the delivery of its mission.

- ✓ Group presentations: As an experienced public speaker, Dan Lococo can address your organization or professional association.
- ✓ Structured brainstorming: A facilitated brainstorming session can help your organization reach a consensus on how to measure what is most important.
- ✓ Model building: A business model can quickly and effectively communicate important information. The integration of analysis tools and graphics allows for the communication of sophisticated information with a minimum of data collection.
- ✓ General consulting: Affinity By Design, LLC can provide a customized combination of facilitation, analysis and consultation to meet the special needs of your organization. General consulting engagements are based upon a mutually agreed upon project charter.

Why You Received This Message:

You have received this newsletter because I have had either direct, or indirect, contact with you regarding the work of Affinity By Design, LLC. If you do not want to receive this newsletter, please let me know via e-mail. Include the words "Take me off your list" either in the subject or body of the message.
