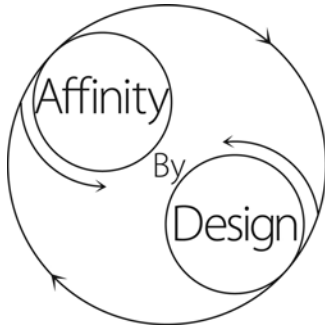


Affinity News

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Greetings:

We are at the point in the year where the promise of spring is becoming apparent and the chill of winter is not quite ready to let go. Part of the fun of spring is seeing the subtle changes that are a part of the seasonal transition. It is often surprising how our attention is focused on the high points of seasonal change (the early warm day, the late snow storm) but the sprouting of bulbs or the return of little creatures goes unnoticed.

The feature story in this issue of the Affinity News comes from observations made while Zoe and I were walking on Sunday, February 7th. Actually, the article came to me on its own after I resolved to just let my mind wander as we walked.

As always, I am grateful for the opportunity to be a part of your day. I appreciate the kind feedback people share with me. Please let me know if I can be of any assistance to you or your organization.

Dan Lococo

Mission, Methods and 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.

Getting in Touch:

I have a practice of taking my dog for a walk every morning. It is an opportunity for Zoe and I to get some exercise and gain a perspective on the day. Zoe finds interesting things to sniff as we walk. I prefer to read.

On the morning of Sunday, February 7th I was looking forward to our walk and to continue reading "The Necessary Revolution" by Peter Senge, et.al. Unfortunately I had forgotten to recharge the battery in my book reader and didn't have enough charge to read while on the walk. I thought of taking my radio and listening to "Speaking of Faith" on NPR but wasn't really interested in the topic for the program. I realized I had a need for audio stimulation while I walked. General rule: a need for diversion is an active avoidance of something. I left the house with pockets empty of electronic devices.

I had only walked a little way before I heard a woodpecker in a tree to the southeast of our house. I had no idea woodpeckers are in my neighborhood the first week of February. As I walked the neighborhood I was able to get a sense of where the bird was. There was only one woodpecker in the neighborhood and it seemed to be content to stay in one place. I have since heard (what I assume is) the same woodpecker on a regular basis.

The woodpecker acted as a reminder to be present to the sounds and smells of the neighborhood. I became very aware of how little I know of the patterns of migratory birds. I welcome them as a sign of winter's passing and the coming of spring but I don't know which will stay with us for the summer and which are on their way to the north. I'd guess woodpeckers are territorial but I'm not sure. I also noted a conspicuous absence of smells. The winter still had a firm hold on the ground. The smells of spring were still a ways off on February 7th.

By the time Zoe and I got back to the house I had resolved to make our Sunday walk a time to give the electronics a rest. I found the direct connection to my surroundings refreshing. It was also good to let my mind wander freely rather than to focus on a pre-determined topic. I am eager to find what the spring will bring to the neighborhood and what will come of taking time to reflect without a specific focus.

Lessons Learned:

It was by chance I found myself on a walk without an agenda. I had forgotten how much I enjoy the opportunity to be outdoors in the early hours of the day. While I am not oblivious to my surroundings when I read while walking, I clearly place a secondary importance on the feedback I receive from my surroundings when my primary focus is on reading a book.

I have no doubt I would have noticed the sound of a woodpecker regardless of the book I might read while walking. Whether I would have noted my surprise at the presence of a woodpecker in February is questionable. I am sure I would not have taken the time to reflect on what I miss by dividing my attention.

This simple experience served as a reminder of how much I miss as a result of taking my surroundings for granted and focusing my attention on more immediate priorities. The take-away from my walk of February 7th is recognition of the value of taking a step back from normal activities for the sole purpose of unstructured reflection.

Applying the Lessons:

As Zoe and I walked on Sunday, February 7th I realized I had placed such a high priority on taking advantage of a good opportunity to enrich my life through reading I had forgotten about how enriching it can be to be present to my surroundings. Ironically, I often use my morning reading time for learning how to foster creative thinking in myself and others.

The most important thing is to make the time for unstructured thinking. In our personal lives this is fairly simple to do. In our organizational lives we need to set aside unstructured time for brainstorming. This could be done as a part of a general meeting or in a periodic gathering dedicated to freethinking. The key is to allow enough time for ideas to come to the table. Fifteen minutes of brainstorming time at the end of a long meeting is unlikely to provide useful insights.

Here are a few ideas to take advantage of time set aside for letting ideas come to you and the teams you participate in:

- Don't expect a break-through idea to jump out and grab you. The best ideas often arrive unexpectedly.
- Use thought joggers to generate ideas. "Finish the sentence..." is a good tool; the most innovative thing I've seen lately is... "It would be really great to"... "I've always wondered how"... etc.

- Avoid judgment of the ideas generated in an open-thinking session. Focus on possibilities, not limitations.
- Allow for unrelated and incomplete ideas. Observations of fascinating things don't need to be directly related to the organization.
- Make note of good ideas and allow time to develop the ideas that have promise.

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.

How Affinity By Design, LLC Can Help:

Is it time to do some analysis of what's effective and what's not? Mapping your organization's information flows might be just the place to get started. You might be surprised at what you'd find. You'll also be surprised at how Affinity By Design, LLC can help your organization focus its talents and resources.

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.

- 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 needs of your organization. General consulting engagements are based upon a mutually agreed upon project charter.
- Group presentations: As an experienced public speaker, Dan Lococo can address your organization or professional association on a wide variety of topics.

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.