



STORIES TRAINERS TELL

Who Called This Meeting?

Contributor

Shelley R. Robbins, Ph.D.; email: shelleYROBBINS@worldnet.att.net

Shelley is currently the executive director of the School of Business of Capella University, and has been a faculty member at Northwestern University, the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, the University of St. Thomas, and the University of Minnesota. Shelley is president of Critical Aspects Consulting, helping organizations align strategy, leadership, learning, and technology, and is co-founder of the Personal Side of Leadership workshops. Shelley holds a Ph.D. in organizational behavior from Northwestern University, and an MBA from the University of Chicago. She lives with her daughter, Isabel, husband, John, and two Irish Wolfhounds, Ginger and Audrey.

Type and Purpose(s)

Vignette; explore and evoke

Background

When Shelley worked as a director of training and human resources development, she often ran into situations when she needed the cooperation and collaboration of people in other departments and areas. What surprised her was that when she tried to get cooperation, other people were not interested even though she thought it was for the good of the company and that everyone shared the same goals.

Presentation Tips

Portray the individuals from the information and technology and sales departments as matter-of-fact and polite, even though they do not express cooperation with their words. Depict Shelley as completely surprised and a bit confused by what she learns.

Set-up

Option 1—What are the dilemmas of being an early adopter of cross-functional teams?

Option 2—It is one thing to believe all employees are working toward the good of the organization; it's another to experience people's true motivations.

Who Called This Meeting?

The results of the company-wide needs assessment were very clear: People were asking for training in how to use word processing, spreadsheets, and other basic computer software. As director of training and human resources development, I knew the organization didn't have a lot of money to buy such training. So, I decided to see what I could organize internally by bringing together the people who had the expertise and the resources.

I invited people in the information and technology department—they had the knowledge. I invited people in the sales training area—they had the facilities and the resources. I also invited people from my department—we were responsible for training.








When I started the meeting, the first thing somebody said was, “Who authorized this meeting?” I was completely stunned. I had no idea this would be questioned. So, I quickly made up a response and said, “My boss, John, authorized this meeting.” He was the vice president of human resources so I figured this was a pretty safe reply. In the meantime, I'm thinking to myself, “Here I am. I've discovered this company-wide need and am trying to address the situation. I didn't think I needed a higher authority.”

Continuing on, I laid out the results of the needs assessment. “Employees have indicated a need for computer training. Here in this room are all the people in the company who I believe have the knowledge and the resources to help them. I was wondering if we could provide them with training. I'm willing to organize everything if those of you in IT are willing to instruct and those of you from sales training are willing to free up your training room.”




I turned to the head of sales training and asked, “Would you be willing to help?” She looked at me and simply said, “No.” I inquired, “What do you mean by ‘no’?” She replied, very matter-of-factly, “I'm sorry. We aren't going to let you use those training rooms.” Then I turned to the people in IT and asked if they could help. They replied, “We would really like to help but we're too busy. And, we have a lot more important things to do. We're sorry, but we won't be able to do this.”

They talked a bit longer during which time I tried my best to persuade them. Then it hit me. Neither group was going to change its mind. I walked away and dropped the project. I didn't have a budget to go outside and hire a person or buy the software to do the training. I learned that for projects to have a chance of succeeding, I would need to understand how power and authority play out in organizations. Reflect for yourself. Notice how "power plays" in your organization.

Debrief Questions

-  What does this story say about interdepartmental alignment?
-  How does this story relate to meeting requests that are to benefit the entire company?
-  What else might Shelley have done to influence the group to be more willing to meet these requests? Given the culture, what could she have done prior to the meeting to influence a positive outcome?
-  What might you have done in Shelley's situation?
-  What do you think are the issues with being an early adopter of cross-functional teamwork?
-  How can you motivate and influence others to take an action for the good of the organization when it may personally mean more work?
-  What are examples of situations in your department in which you have needed to collaborate with other departments to meet internal needs? How have you made that work?

Key: Three Levels of Debrief Questions

-  **The Story:** What the story means—its moral or main lesson. What the story characters have experienced.
-  **The Learner:** How the participant feels about the story and how it personally applies to the individual.
-  **The Organization or World:** How the story applies to the participant's work group, department, business unit, division, organization, industry, or to society-at-large.

Key Point Options

1. Not seeing the merits of cross-functional teamwork can lead to departments focusing so exclusively on their own goals that they miss meeting organization-wide goals. This tunnel vision is created by the motivations of those involved, and has significant impact on overall success. This is an issue of organizational alignment and clarity of its mission, vision, and values.
2. Sometimes bureaucratic organizations find it is almost impossible to get things done when they need assistance from others. The accepted organizational norms are politically based instead of being based on internal and external customer needs. Influencing these groups to focus on the customer can be exceedingly difficult.
3. “Optimizing the system” in an organization means that each area takes ownership of supporting the needs of the whole organization versus optimizing individual business entities. A key way to optimize any system is through collaboration and feedback.

Follow-up Activities

Step 1—Individual Activity or Groups from the Same Department: On a sheet of paper (or on a prepared worksheet), write down three lists:

- What work is your department responsible for? What motivates you to accomplish this work?
- What departments or groups is your department dependent on to accomplish its work? How can you influence these departments or groups to get what you need?
- What departments or groups depend on your department to accomplish their work? What motivates you to provide good service to them?

Step 2—Large-Group Discussion: What happens when one part of the system breaks down or one part of the system refuses to collaborate?

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