



Bringing Meaning into Monday™

Improving workplace effectiveness and health – economic and cultural

By Mark D. Sauter, author, *Bringing Meaning into Monday™*

“In today’s economic climate, we’re continually being asked to do more with less.”

- Ann Fillmore, Executive Director
United Way of Midland County (Michigan)

Virtually all nonprofits – specifically human service organizations – are feeling the sting of economic crunch. While there are fewer dollars available, in terms of grants and charitable giving, there is more and more work to do. Performance expectations are changing as benefactors are becoming more discerning and results-oriented, and responding to client needs is increasingly more demanding and complex.

As in many other communities, this was the situation facing Midland County, Michigan. “Change cannot be mandated. We, and our supported agencies, needed to identify new, more collaborative ways to leverage increasingly limited resources – internally and externally,” said Ann Fillmore, Executive Director of the United Way. “The challenge is how.”

Process versus Event

To meet today’s challenges, leaders need to tap into virtually limitless sources of emotional, social and spiritual energy. To achieve this, leaders have to establish a sense of shared purpose and streamline the decisions, services and systems necessary to achieve it – shifting mindsets and replacing low-value and/or antiquated work practices. In addition to improving performance, this unified sense of focus will build increased trust and accountability and better tap the diverse talents of individuals – improving creativity, teamwork and their emotional sense of connection.

With this in mind, in the spring of 2010, three nonprofit agencies in Midland County (stories below) embraced a community-based approach to organizational improvement. While each agency pursued a distinctly different priority, they, collectively (i.e., affordably), learned a *repeatable* process that helps good leaders learn how to become BEST leaders – leaders skilled at:

- Building trust and accountability
- Establishing shared purpose
- Streamlining systems and services
- Tapping talent

This process, called *Bringing Meaning into Monday™*, focuses attention on the little understood, frontend challenges inherent within all improvement initiatives – *the ability to get everyone on the same page*. Via application to existing priorities, leaders were

exposed to the “art” of unifying diverse, even opposing viewpoints – aligning individual agendas and self-interests with shared priorities, priorities focused on producing value. This alignment, in turn, optimizes implementation time and cost and increases workplace commitment and the downstream results achieved.

In most cases, this process utilizes an existing vision or mission; *helping leaders define the critical success factors necessary to achieve it*. Once defined, goals are established and a short, practical and shared list of prioritized actions is agreed to.

Leading versus Lagging

When it comes to successfully managing change, the odds of success can be significantly improved by monitoring and managing *leading* indicators – like the introduction of new work processes, reward and tracking systems, workplace testimonies and ownership, and leadership effectiveness as it pertains to addressing environmental factors that directly influence results.

In what follows, each team’s initial feedback will be shared, using a five-point scale to assess the multi-step facilitated program. While informative, this is not the most important measure; therefore more attention will be directed at what *work* and/or *leading indicators* have occurred in the first 60-days – post-program. *Work*, when managed intentionally, that will generate momentum and lead to longer-term *lagging* results in terms of financial and community impact, service and productivity improvement, and client and/or employee satisfaction. The intent is to revisit these teams in six and twelve months. At that time, assessing lagging impact.

A Sustainable Approach to Bottom Line Success

The process provided structure: a shared experience; a common language; a connection to the bigger goal.

- Participants feedback

As organizations become healthier – financially and culturally – so will communities in terms of economic growth and jobs, healthier families, and civic vitality. All forms of relationships will improve, as will creativity and cooperation. Employees will have greater understanding as to how they individually and collectively contribute value to the lives of others, which in turn, will motivate them to maintain the health and quality of theirs – in and outside of work.



West Midland Family Center

Goal: Increase utilization of volunteers in order to optimize costs, expand and improve programs and services, and build stronger community ties.

Initial program feedback (5-pt scale): 4.17

60-day update:

- ✓ Increased volunteer usage in summer programs; well over 100% at Floyd elementary.
- ✓ Using skilled volunteer to assess alternative energy options.
- ✓ Reduced 75% of set-up costs for inflatable obstacle course – used to broaden community awareness; projecting 5x annual increase in use/deployment.
- ✓ Developed a volunteer tracking system: monitoring time spent and impact on facility.
- ✓ Optimized donated clothing room: fewer hours (12 vs. 88) yet more control, value and volunteer attractiveness.
- ✓ Establishing a bonus plan for volunteer utilization; looking to incorporate within job descriptions and employee evaluations.
- ✓ Initiating a cultural “mindshift;” first via process champions – expanding via observation.
- ✓ “Absolutely ... the process did what I wanted,” said Greg Dorrien, Executive Director.



Cancer Services

Goal: Improve fund development – identify and strengthen key relationships, build coalitions.

Initial program feedback (5-pt scale): 4.40

60-day update:

- ✓ “This process came at just the right time. To be successful we need to strengthen coalitions,” said Susan Dusseau, Executive Director
- ✓ Investigated fundraising best practices (seminar).
- ✓ Identifying and clarifying role of board members and recruitment process.
- ✓ Drafted an event planning process / template
- ✓ Developed tracking system to monitor key events and donation sources – better understand key segments.
 - Investigating ways to tailor and optimize the fundraising approach to different segments.
- ✓ 2-3 goals / recommendations have been developed – pursuing full board commitment end-July.
- ✓ Revisiting community perception – brand positioning and key messages.
- ✓ Exploring expanding use of adhoc volunteers and committees to assist with fundraising activities.
- ✓ “The process helped clarify our thinking about fundraising – short- and long-term,” said Marie Eckstein, Board Member



United Way of Midland County

Goal: Create a shared vision for the organization – strengthen workplace accountability and demonstrate community impact.

Initial program feedback (5-pt scale): 4.33

60-day update:

- ✓ “Recognized early, developing a new North Star was too broad, instead we concentrated on better aligning our resources to what we had,” said Ann Fillmore, UW Executive Director
- ✓ Established an annual project timeline.
- ✓ Established a new work process – a Project Navigator tool that outlined goals, vision alignment, resource needs and communication strategies.
 - Applied – piloted – within our Volunteer Connection program.
 - Brought alignment and solidification – better clarified and managed expectations.
 - Significantly improved communication strategy
 - Identified key drivers – clarified accountability
 - Expanded our thinking – early on – beyond silos
 - Proactively identified key players, expectations and required resources.
- ✓ In 2010, plan to repeat ‘pilot’ 2-3X. This will help define *criteria of use* and audiences going into 2011.
- ✓ “Enjoyed this process – it’s inline w/ how I’m wired and it helped to reignite my drive for forward motion,” said Holly Miller, UW Communications Director

Qualitative “team” comments captured following facilitated sessions:

- Needed a process/structure to help us define and share in our mission. It's a dial, not a switch. We'll work through conflict, knowing that we're on the same page and in agreement as to what we said we were going to do. A shared experience with key people at the table, going forward with a common language.
- Buy-in by going back to the rest of our staff. We feel a connection to the bigger goal. It took more time, but it was worth it. We're no longer randomly bumping into each other hoping to make some sort of contact once in a while.
- More hopeful now that we have a good plan that we developed together as a team. I no longer feel like a lone ranger, but I have partners.
- The structure was good. The Board had already raised many of these issues. Now we have a unified understanding and plan to act on them. We shared assignments, responsibility, ownership and accountability.
- We needed the structure; being "nice" isn't enough. This model could be used by nonprofits and for-profits.
- Efficient process, the effectiveness is up to us. We'll use the approach whenever we need to build team consensus around an issue.