



# Focus

A publication of Wagner Consulting Group

December 2009



## The New Normal at the North Pole

Santa and Bernard, Santa's Chief of Toy Manufacturing, sat glumly in the factory conference room. It was very late, and the elves had long since left for the day. Christmas was approaching, and old Kris Kringle was fearful that he would not be able to fulfill children's wishes this year because toy production had failed to keep up with demand. In addition to population growth, the ratio of good boys and girls had risen dramatically – far faster than the workshop crew had been able to ramp up toy production. Santa and Bernard had been working on the problem for weeks, without resolution. Things looked hopeless! Then Mrs. Claus (the former Mary Christmas) entered the room with a tray of cookies and hot chocolate.

"Kris, I've been thinking about your problem," said Mary, as she served Santa and Bernard. She continued, "I recently read an article in *Toys Weekly*, that magazine focusing on toy supply chain problems. It stated the current trends will continue, and called this the 'new normal.' The article went on to describe a solution to inadequate productivity, and it didn't involve expensive new equipment or complicated reengineering. Kris, it's as simple as better communication." Bernard cocked an eyebrow at Santa, the unmistakable meaning being *I've heard this before*. Santa sighed deeply, but managed a wan smile for Mary and she went on.

Mary described a five step process to get employees more involved with their jobs. She called this increasing employee engagement, and outlined the following process.

**Reaffirm core values.** All people can lose sight of the ultimate purpose from time to time, and leaders must keep core beliefs front and center. The mission will change with events, and the vision may shift from time to time. But values seldom change. Beliefs guide behavior, and values define beliefs. Values give work meaning, and serve as a firm foundation for everything else.

**Describe a compelling vision.** Without a vision, the people perish says *Proverbs*. Hope, excitement, joy, and enthusiasm wane for employees without constant reminders of the vision. People yearn to be part of something grand. "Also," Mary added, "don't get hung up on internal and external vision statements; it's okay to have two, one tailored for the elves and a second, congruent with the internal vision, for the children. Double vision can be helpful in some cases." Santa softly groaned at the pun, but remained attentive.

**Share key information.** Mary continued, "People perform better when they know the score. Imagine a football game without a scoreboard or a clock; how well would that work? Share important measurements with the elves that can influence the outcomes they measure. This doesn't require you to open the workshop's books, or reveal other sensitive information. But do think about what best measures the ultimate workshop goals."

**Explain the Why.** First explaining the why – before the what, how and when – is one of the best ways to improve employee engagement and, as a result, productivity. When you tell someone why, you begin to engage their heart and mind, not just their hands and feet. True, sometime hands and feet are good enough, but why not aim higher?

**Brainstorm.** Getting people together to think about new and better ways to reach a goal always yields benefits. People learn from each other, and enjoy sharing their thoughts and ideas. Mary concluded, “Kris, the elves feel respected when their squeaky little voices are being heard. I know you treat them well, but this is different. Also, from your perspective, even *if* no useful new ideas are generated, learning what the elves are thinking is valuable information you can use to head off potential problems or harness elfin energy.”

Santa’s mood had brightened remarkably by the time Mary finished speaking. “Mary,” he said, “you always seem to know just what I need and when I need it. And this advice makes perfect sense – I feel certain Bernard and I can inspire our elves to increase production and maintain quality! We will start tomorrow by crafting an aspirational vision statement. But now, let’s go plan our December 26 workshop party.”

*Tom Wagner*

We help our clients find and profit from opportunities - especially in turbulent times - with  
Executive support, Strategic planning, & Employee development

[www.wagnercg.com](http://www.wagnercg.com)

Call us at 800 422-1374 to learn more

If you do not want to receive this newsletter, reply to this e-mail with REMOVE in the Subject field.