

Do you ever feel as though you are being pulled in too many directions? Are you just barely getting the basics done? I, like many of you, actively contribute to multiple organizations, associations and communities for personal and professional reasons. Couple that with managing a business and a household; well let's just say that my productivity is largely a function of how well I prioritize. I suspect many of you can relate which is why this month's newsletter provides practical tips on how to pave the way for greater productivity by establishing priorities. Once priority projects are set then problem solving and developing solutions for each is a natural next step. Thus an article on how to facilitate meetings that genuinely foster creative thinking is included in this edition too.

Happy Spring!

---

## PRIORITIES PAVE THE WAY FOR PRODUCTIVITY

By Carol Bergeron

Let's face it. There is no shortage of new work that needs to get done. This is true of all organizations. Too often however, leaders add new work without taking into account the existing work load. The net result is an overabundance of work with no recognizable distinction between tasks of greatest and least importance. Thus individuals, teams and even entire organizations assume all tasks have equal priority. This approach does not produce the best outcomes. Here are some tips on how to pave the way for greater productivity by establishing priorities. Walk through these steps with team members to foster increased understanding, insightful decision making and greater commitment.



### 1. Identify what is most important

Of all the work you do, what work absolutely needs to get done? Think of these tasks as your base line. While there may be room to streamline these tasks, eliminating them is not an option (though outsourcing them may be). Of the remaining and prospective items, which contribute most to organizational success? Establishing selection criteria may help when making tough choices between initiatives that have short and long term impact. Don't forget to deliberately decide what work will be eliminated. This is a step often forgotten that drives people crazy and can lead to equal treatment of all work.

### 2. Set goals within organizational context

Work that has no connection to the organization should be at risk. As a leader your job is to make a strong and legitimate case for how work contributes to the success of the organization. You will need this to gain organizational commitment for resources. A common goal and direction is also a key ingredient to a committed workforce.

### 3. Allocate relevant resources

Put your resources where your priorities are to avoid mixed messages. This applies to money, time, people, facilities, etc. During difficult economic times and whenever you reprioritize work, it is not unusual to shift resources to the most critical tasks. Leaders stand to gain a lot of credibility when the

highest priority tasks get the needed resources. How well are your espoused priorities and resources aligned?

#### **4. Clarify roles and responsibilities**

Break work down into manageable chunks and assign them to people who possess the skills, knowledge, and expertise needed to perform well. Play to people's strengths and desire for stretch, yet not unrealistic, development assignments. I am a fan of teams that have a mix of seasoned and less experienced professionals. The pros can help the team avoid common pitfalls since they have encountered them before. Folks with less experience often revisit the most basic of assumptions and approaches – their perspective can be refreshing.

#### **5. Exude Leadership**

Effective leaders ensure continued organizational visibility for the highest priority work. They recognize that visibility is necessary to sustain resources and the commitment and motivation level of people. They anticipate and remove obstacles. They also reward the achievement of milestones because they recognize everyone wants to be on a winning team and celebrating a series of small wins builds momentum and a winning mentality.

The next time environmental changes result in more work for your organization, think first about prioritizing that work and eliminating unnecessary work. Productivity gains will result when priorities, resources, expertise and leadership are working toward the same goals.

---

## **ENCOURAGE CREATIVE IDEAS IN TEAM MEETINGS**

By Jeff Govendo

Most business leaders instinctively know that if there are solutions to the daunting challenges they face, most of these must come from within their own ranks. Nobody has a better understanding of a company and the obstacles it must contend with than its own employees.

But knowledge and experience alone can't guarantee innovative solutions. Problem-solvers must think about these challenges in new ways to avoid coming up repeatedly with the same fixes. They need to use their imagination and creativity both individually and in concert with their colleagues to bring new thinking to these issues.

How can team members be encouraged to draw upon their expertise and creativity to explore new possibilities? Here are five tips for keeping the creative juices flowing:

#### **1. Always have a clear objective for problem-solving.**

Too often employees go into a meeting with only a vague sense of what they are supposed to be working on or the expected output. Problem-solvers are more willing to experiment with new thinking if they know what they're trying to accomplish. Creative thinking is rarely linear, so a clearly stated objective serves as a touchstone in a process that may go in many different directions.

**2. Encourage speculative thinking when brainstorming ideas.**

We need to give ourselves permission when trying out new, untested ideas. Particularly in groups, using phrases such as “I wonder if ...” or “Just suppose ...” reinforces the open-ended, wishful nature of creative idea generation, and discourages premature judgment and critique.

**3. Listen to build, not evaluate.**

Every idea has the potential for suggesting another that may be even more promising. Let all ideas offered stand and encourage participants to build upon them, rather than evaluate them. Later on, they can choose the most promising ones for further focus and development, without judging each one along the way.

**4. Conclude with a set of action items or recommendations.**

Even an exciting, innovative solution is not likely to go anywhere without some clearly stated next steps, along with who is responsible for them and when. Be very specific about these, and insist on follow-through!

**5. When the stakes are high, benefit from engaging a skilled, neutral facilitator.**

A good facilitator will not only keep the process moving along, but also preserve ideas that have been put forth and support the people who offer them. This is extremely important if you want them to keep contributing and take the risks necessary to experiment with new thinking.

Try instituting these guidelines and you’ll see more creative output from the people who know your business best: your own employees.

*Jeff Govendo is president of The Innovative Edge™ Inc., a consulting firm in Massachusetts that helps client organizations tackle tough challenges through creative problem solving. Mr. Govendo works in a broad range of industries as a project consultant, group facilitator, trainer and conference designer, enabling organizations to achieve their goals by increasing their capacity for innovation.*

<http://www.innov-edge.com> , [jgovendo@innov-edge.com](mailto:jgovendo@innov-edge.com)

---

## OUTSIDE INSIGHTS

Outside Insights is a service to help executives with complex business problems and challenges. Clients appreciate the fresh perspectives offered by experienced business advisors and the expedient way in which they are delivered. Explore **Outside Insights** to see if it is right for you.

[www.outsideinsights.org](http://www.outsideinsights.org). If so then contact: [carol@bergeronassociates.com](mailto:carol@bergeronassociates.com).



Outside Insights © Copyright 2005 Alliance for Professional Excellence.

---

## RESOURCES

**2005 Schedule for Educational Workshops** at [www.bergeronassociates.com/calendar.htm](http://www.bergeronassociates.com/calendar.htm).

How to Develop a Talent Strategy

Dynamic Coaching for High-Performance Organizations

---

How to Build a High-Performance Organization - One by One **New**  
Hiring the Right People **New**

### **Resource for Workforce Effectiveness Information**

We publish articles and an electronic newsletter filled with practical tips on how to enhance the performance of people and organizations. Explore our publications:

[www.bergeronassociates.com/publications.htm](http://www.bergeronassociates.com/publications.htm)

---

## **ABOUT BERGERON ASSOCIATES**

Bergeron Associates helps build agile, robust, high-performance organizations by integrating business and workforce strategies.

Bergeron Associates  
101 Middlesex Tpke, Ste 6, PMB 326  
Burlington, MA 01803-4914  
781-376-4071

[carol@bergeronassociates.com](mailto:carol@bergeronassociates.com)  
[www.bergeronassociates.com](http://www.bergeronassociates.com)

---

## **NEWSLETTER SUBSCRIPTION**

If you want to automatically receive future newsletters then subscribe at: [www.bergeronassociates.com](http://www.bergeronassociates.com). Your contact information is stored confidentially and will not be shared with anyone outside of Bergeron Associates. You may unsubscribe at any time.

---

© Copyright 2005 Bergeron Associates. This publication may be redistributed in full or in part provided full attribution and our contact information (company name, phone number and email and web site addresses) are included.