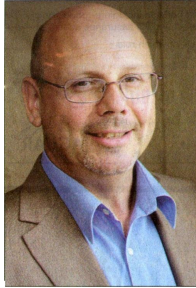


Brainstorming Steve's the man who puts the meat into meetings

His aim to make every worker feel included in making the big decisions



by Alan Bunce Business Editor, Reading Chronicle. 26th July 2007

MOST workers will know how unproductive some meetings can be. Steve Rothwell has made it his job to put that right.

Mr Rothwell from Earley, has packed in his work as a project manager with technology firm Xansa to set up his own consultancy which helps workers make group decisions.

As facilitator Mr Rothwell says he can go into firms, independently of office politics and with a few ground rules laid down, get groups of workers, often in diverse workforces, to jointly contribute to decisions.

Errors, assumptions and miscommunications often leave workers going along with decisions they don't really support, or even not going along with decisions because they feel excluded. His methods include force field analysis where the pros and cons of a decision are each given scores; a voting process where workers put a sticker against options they prefer until clusters are noticed and a brainstorming process in which every individual contributes by initially brainstorming alone.

Mr Rothwell says decisions reached using his methods then have more support or 'buy in' because workers feel they made a difference. That's when his task has been most successful. He said: "It can be an absolutely fantastic feeling. You can feel that the group is feeling good about themselves. They are standing a little bit taller and the conversations carry on in the corridors.

"Sometimes it goes so well you get no credit for it. That's what I'm aiming for. My job is to help people use the knowledge they have already got. Sometimes they surprise themselves and go on and implement the change and follow through their decision."

Mr Rothwell had joined Xansa to work in IT but found he could bring the same teamworking practices used in IT, such-as getting team members to understand projects, into transition management. In April he left to start his own business **Elstar Consulting** to take his skills to other workplaces.

He aims for medium-sized employers where he can be an attractive alternative to costly management consultants. Other services he provides include project planning, preparing for outsourcing and resolving issues.

He said: "If you want to minimise the cost and if you believe your people have the knowledge to work it out for themselves, but just need to focus, I can do a very targeted few workshops, a few one-to-ones and you have not had an army of consultants coming in."

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