

FEATURES

What Has He Done For Me Lately?

by W. Scott Cameron

I had a boss once who continually asked me what the purpose of my work was, who were my customers, and how was I keeping my customers informed about my team's work. At first I found these questions perplexing, as my customers should have known the answers. I had covered them in my monthly/quarterly reports or in my project meeting notes. Finally, I confronted him about his questions. He acknowledged that my customers had this information, but he was hearing some disturbing comments between when I submitted my reports, comments like, "What has he done for me lately?"

I decided to take this input to heart. My ideas about communications norms needed a major overhaul. The communication norms I was comfortable with were becoming outdated. I realized the written and verbal communications response time was suddenly being measured in days or minutes. People's perception of a project team based on monthly or quarterly meetings was no longer adequate. In the past, once the team's credibility was established it was hard to change. In a rapid-fire communications world, no news causes people to question what the team is doing to move the business/project ahead.

I decided I needed to change my "communications game" and began developing a proactive communications strategy to maintain the high credibility of the team and market their excellent work. This strategy required several components:

- Definition: we had to define our target audiences and understand what would be important to them.
- Timeliness: what are we doing for our customers today? Forget the axiom no news is good news.
- Consistency: we're in control of problems and here's what we are doing about them.
- Recognition: we showcase the project team's work while allowing hierarchy an opportunity to quickly recognize their contributions.
- Versatility: we needed to take advantage of all available communications technologies, e.g., e-mail, presentation software, face-to-face...

With these components in mind, I implemented a "Blurb" approach. What is a "Blurb"? It's a sound bite or a small piece of information explaining some excellent work someone is doing. The intent is to continually remind people the team



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is credible and very much in control. It also serves the dual purpose of sharing information throughout various organizations so they can benefit from what one team has learned and hence not waste time trying to reinvent the wheel.



Every star visible in this image is either more highly evolved than, or in a few rare cases more massive than, our own sun. Especially obvious are the bright red giants, which are stars similar to the Sun in mass that are nearing the ends of their lives. This stellar swarm, one of the densest of the 147 known globular star clusters in the Milky Way galaxy, is located about 28,000 light years from Earth.

I soon realized marketing a "Blurb" approach would not be easy. People typically do not want to communicate their efforts until they have all the data. It would take time too before people or teams saw the benefits of this type of communi-

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cations and became proactive participants. Hence, I took upon myself to market the "Blurb." It has become my personal crusade.

In my organization, I believe the "Blurb" communication model has been a tremendous success for people who have embraced it. The proactive nature of sharing the team's successes and acknowledging their temporary setbacks has given teams solid credibility throughout their careers. It is easy to become cynical about traditional and non-traditional rewards and recognition programs. However, as we continue to raise the bar on what we expect out of our project managers, we need to look for new and exciting ways to celebrate not only their team's successes but also their individual success.

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