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SOURCE: <http://wraygroup.com>
CONTACT Wray Group
INFORMATION: 225-1000 Roosevelt Cres.
North Vancouver, BC V7P 3R4
Canada
(604) 990-1321
clientservices@wraygroup.com

no more blank stares: part two

A Naturally Engaging Planning Meeting

by Alex Wray

Still haven't read Part One? [Click here](#) to learn about the simple but critical process Sean and his team used to prepare for this meeting.

The day of Sean's planning meeting arrived. He was excited and confident until he saw Tina at the coffee machine. "How are you doing, Tina?" Sean asked. "Been better," she replied curtly and quickly headed toward the meeting room.

He'd hoped for a more positive response, but wasn't surprised. Tina had been troubling Sean since he became team leader three months ago. He regarded her as his "talented underachiever." She did enough not to get in trouble, but other staff had come to speak with him about her attitude. He hoped this planning process would help him figure out how best to coach and work with her.

Sean entered the meeting room and began by getting formalities out of the way. Then he continued:

"Our goal as a team is simple – to perform at our best...and my role is to support you each in performing *your* best."

Sean went on: "Our performance is influenced by ability and motivation. Knowing how *you* regard your ability and motivation on your Top 5 priorities will help me and the rest of the team to know how and where to best support you."

Then Sean gave his instructions. He asked each person to select a partner and interview him for her for five minutes, using the Wray Performance Window™.¹ After this, everyone was to report back to the team with what they had learned.

Within minutes, the room was abuzz as people partnered up and started their interviews.

Tina's discontent came through as her colleague Sam interviewed her. "I have really low motivation for maintaining the information system," she said.

"But you're so good at that stuff!" exclaimed Sam

"I know, but there's so much more I'd rather be doing," she said with a sigh.

¹ For more on the Wray Performance Window™, read Living Engagement: It starts with a simple conversation, 2nd Ed., at www.wraygroup.com.

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Sam probed with one of the coaching prompts Sean had distributed earlier: “What makes it so unappealing?”

“I’ve done it for years,” she explained. “I regret the day I showed people how well I could do it. I feel stuck. Everyone says, ‘Give it to Tina if it has to do with maintenance, she’s so good at it!’”

“So even though you’re great at it, you’re tired of it?” Sam persisted.

“Yup, there is no longer any challenge in it. I could do it in my sleep! It’s not like my other priorities – those are new and fresh, but I seldom have time to do them.”

The interview continued until Tina had explained her ability and motivation for each of her five priorities. Fortunately for Sam, Tina didn’t hold the same disgust for the other ones.

Once everyone had plotted their priorities and used the coaching prompts to understand their partner’s Top 5 list, Sean called the group back together. “We’ll start each report with your greatest insight into what affects your partner’s performance.”

Sam volunteered to go first, and explained his greatest insight into Tina, “I was astonished that even though Tina’s strongest ability is for maintaining the information system, it is the last thing she wants to be doing.”

“But that’s what you do so well,” several team members chorused.

Sam laughed. “I know, but she’d rather have a root canal!”

Sean stepped in, “Why haven’t you mentioned this before?”

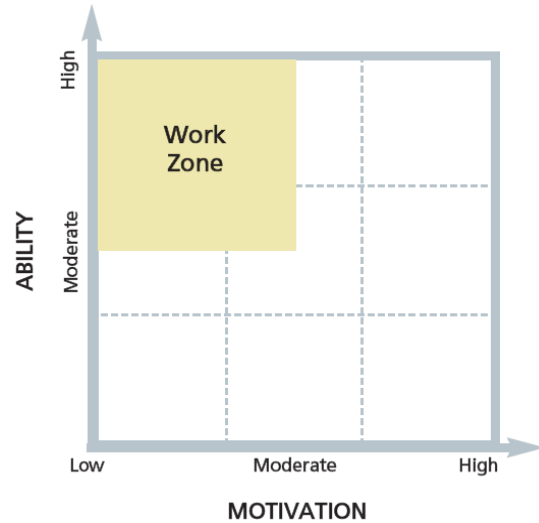
“It didn’t occur to me. Plus, I don’t like to complain,” Tina explained.

“That’s not complaining!” Sean reassured her. “It obviously affects you, and now I’m glad I know. That’s why we’re taking this time to talk together. How might we support you?”

Joe, a relatively new team member, piped up. “I don’t know much about maintaining the system, but I’d love to learn. With some support, I could probably take that priority.”

Tina lit up. “Hey if you want to learn, I’d love to teach!”

They both looked at Sean for approval. “It sounds like it could work,” he said. “How about the three of us take it off-line and figure out how the re-assignment and mentoring will work?”



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“It’s a date!” Tina exclaimed. Joe nodded and smiled his approval.

In three months, Sean had never seen that side of Tina. It was as if a cloud had lifted simply by addressing this one issue, and the whole team felt the benefit. The rest of the meeting maintained the same candor and energy, as team members explored the issues influencing their individual performance on their coming priorities.

In the weeks that followed, Sean saw a new Tina. Their relationship developed and he was soon coaching her on new stretch assignments that she requested.

Sean wanted a more engaging meeting, and that’s what he got. What he hadn’t anticipated was the sustained energy that came as a result of those simple conversations.

Alex Wray is the co-founder and principal of the Wray Group, an international management development and consulting firm located in Vancouver, Canada. Since 1993, they have supported clients, ranging from innovative niche players to members of the esteemed Fortune 20, to realize more of their potential. They achieve this through engaging people to the company priorities and objectives that matter most, and equipping each person to deliver results to the best of their abilities. Wray Group believes in focusing and optimizing the creative energy and spirit of people to achieve outstanding business results – transforming the “workplace” into a great place to work.

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