

## The Birthday Club

- a cool tool to manage rumours -

Implementing and managing change provides excellent fodder for the rumour mill within your organization. Most organizations I visit always wish that their formal communications protocol worked as effectively as their rumour mill. The Birthday Club is one formal method that can aid you in getting closer to your employees and manage your rumour mill.

Most organizations hold regular "Town Hall" meetings to keep employees updated and informed on business progress and status. Typically these meetings are a form of one way communication which is normally used to communicate policy changes. The meetings are scripted, rehearsed and offer little opportunity for dialogue even if desired by management.

The Birthday Club works on stimulating dialogue with your employees and then using the power of your rumour mill to transfer the knowledge to the rest of your work force.

**The invitees** ... As the title depicts, the Birthday Club would meet monthly. For companies running multiple shifts you can maximize your resources by hosting the meeting bridging shift exchange. As the Senior leader you invite those employees that will be celebrating a birthday during the month. It is also a good idea to invite new employees that have joined your organization during the past month since they can be very prone to the effects of the rumour mill. For smaller organizations you can schedule to host a Birthday Club meeting every two months ... but to keep the rumour mill relatively quiet the more frequent the better. Typically, we advise organizations not to include managers and supervisors to the Birthday Club meeting sine you desire unfiltered comments from the shop level. You can have a separate Birthday Club meeting for leadership staff.

**The Setting** ... this is a celebration so make sure that you have some celebratory treats available for your employees, cup cakes, doughnuts, a birthday cake. Attempt to find a location where you can facilitate the Birthday Club in a casual manner. The perfect setting would be a location where chairs can be arranged in a circular fashion.

**Facilitation** ... this is the most difficult for Senior Leaders. Employees are always looking to you for direction and policy. While facilitating the Birthday Club you need to use a slightly different approach. First you must never stand while speaking, this will be translated as policy transfer. Attempt to remain seated so you appear at the same level as your employees. Now the tough part ... remain quiet after thanking employees for attending your session and congratulating them about their special day. The quiet may seem like it lasts forever ... but it will not. Let an employee stimulate discussion ... no one likes quiet so you can be guaranteed that someone will stimulate a topic for discussion.

**The Conversation** ... hopefully issues related to operation s will be raised that you can either verify or deny. However do not loose heart if during the entire meeting nothing related to work is tabled. This is actually a perfect outcome since folks are in essence telling you they like the way things are going. You need to allow all kinds of topics to be raised ... which can span from mortgage renewals to purchase or lease of a new vehicle. In some cases, it is advisable to include an external guest to the Birthday Club meeting, just make sure they follow the same socio-tech model ... it needs to remain casual.

Birthday Club Prep ... in order to get people to your Birthday Club Meeting you need to send an invitation in advance.

*"Unless you try to do something beyond what you have already mastered, you will never grow."*

Ronald. E. Osborn

Where Lean Thoughts can become Reality

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## Birthday Club and other Communications tricks

We suggest that you have an independent Birthday Club facilitator assigned. This person would issue the invitations, follow-up to insure attendance. Yes, attendance is voluntary ... but you should invoke firm encouragement for all selected to attend. We suggest using the following invitation with particular emphasis on the last line of the invitation ... "is their any truth to the rumour ....."? This will allow the meeting facilitator to address the concerns during the course of the meeting.

YOU ARE PERSONALLY INVITED TO ATTEND

KUNST      President's Round Table

This a forum to informally discuss issues or to gain a better insight about our company.  
Help us by indicating your interest in specific topics below

Company Benefits	
Gage Customers	
Company Quality Systems	
Company Production System	
SS + 1	

*Is there any truth to the rumour .....*

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**Conclusion** ... in essence you will be able to get close to 1/12<sup>th</sup> of your population on a monthly basis in a small informal and intimate manner. After the meeting you can be assured that others will be asking the attendees what topics were discussed and the associated responses (the rumour mill in action ... but stimulated by you). Also as the Birthday Club becomes more entrenched you can be sure that folks will get attendees to seek clarification or confirmation of certain topic areas.

Other effective Communication Tricks picked up along the way ...

At one company they have a mandate to be able to communicate information from the Board Room to all employees within the organization within **4 minutes**. Here are some simple tricks you can use;

Your **Paging System** is the most under utilized communications device. Expand the use from paging individuals to communicating information. Provide regular updates during the day. Use it to communication thanks or celebrations, priority of orders etc. You were used to those daily messages in school ... so why not at work?

Communications Boards ... drive me crazy in most companies. Typically the information is very stale and out dated on the boards. First, assign a board owner to a specific board. Place a **laminated board owner tag** on the board complete with a picture of the board owner and a place where they can fill in the "Last Updated". This allows folks just to look at the tag and if the date has changed stop to read the most recent information added.

Of course, other traditional communication tools are always effective such as daily Shift Exchange meeting and Daily Report-Outs using formal **Report-Out boards**. **Name Stamps** are effective at showing your foot prints through-out the facility without you having to be visible. Rolling White Boards using **A3 principals** are excellent for having teams do specific updates on problems or projects within the Gemba so you can read, review and see your team members specific actions implemented.

Contact us if you want some help putting a communications protocol together for your organization.