

Bridging the Credibility Gap

by Jim Clemmer

Too many managers have a giant credibility gap with the people they are charged with managing. Credibility is based on perceptions of trustworthiness, reliability and integrity. Yet, studies indicate that many employees just don't believe or trust their organizational leaders.

Just 53 per cent "of employees believe the information they receive from senior management," according to Bruce Katcher, president of Discovery Surveys, a Massachusetts-based firm specializing in conducting employee opinion and customer satisfaction surveys and focus groups. He bases the figure on a review of the company's database of 30,000 respondents from 44 international companies.

Another survey of a cross-section of 1,000 working Americans in companies with at least 1,000 employees found that "only half of employees believe what their companies tell them—and almost 20 per cent do not believe that their employers usually tell them the truth."

The May, 2003, survey, which was done by Harris Interactive and commissioned by Towers Perrin, also indicated that "employees generally believe their companies are more honest with shareholders and customers than they are with employees."

One deadly consequence of this management credibility gap is that employees emotionally distance and disengage themselves from their bosses and their organizations. And this we/they schism can have profoundly negative consequences.

It can deplete morale and undermine efforts to build strong brands, when uncaring staff take little pride in their work and may even show customers disdain for their employers.

It can also take a disastrous toll on organizational improvement efforts when the people who will make or break such efforts have mentally quit their jobs but keep trudging in to work every day.

It's nearly impossible to improve an individual's, team's or organization's performance in productivity, cost-effectiveness, customer service and innovation if employees don't trust their managers.

If the snicker factor in hallways and cafeterias runs high, management's grand strategies and exhortations will be a source of cynical merriment—and half-hearted action, at best.

How do managers with a we/they attitude widen the credibility gap with the people they manage?

Looking outside, instead of within

Too often, managers fail to develop internal expertise, draw out the ideas of the people closest to the action, or systematically collect customer input from employees directly serving the customers. To make matters worse, managers then reveal their thinly disguised contempt for the lack of homegrown know-how by continually turning to outsiders for expertise and advice. Managers don't see employees as credible or worth investing in. Employees reciprocate.

Not serving the servers

Few employees directly serving customers can provide excellent service when they themselves can get only mediocre support from above. Ineffective processes, misaligned systems, internal conflict, bad communication, uncaring bosses, inadequate training, faulty feedback loops—the list of factors that contributes to the credibility gap runs far too depressingly long in far too many organizations. Poorly served servers rarely produce well-served customers.

To make matters worse, as employee dissatisfaction rises and customer satisfaction falls,

continued on page 3

IN THIS ISSUE

Bridging the Credibility Gap	1
Presidents Message	2
Take a Hike	2
Library Report	4
High-Maintenance Students	5
SAFA Annual Election	6
Editorial Cartoon	6

www.safacalgary.com

SAFA office is located
in N201 Burns Building

Phone - 284-8321

Fax - 284-0005

e-mail: safa@sait.ca

SAIT
Academic
Faculty
Association

Volume 11 • No 5

MAR/APR 2005

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE



by Ed Logue

Hours of Work

As the demand on instructors' time at SAIT becomes more and more unreasonable, it is important that instructors have an understanding of how much work they are required to perform in order to fulfill their obligation to the Employer. Work is not open-ended. There is a limit to how much work can be demanded of an academic staff member.

How many hours is an instructor required to work?

The answer to this question can be found in Sub-section 35.01 of the Collective Agreement which states that "The normal hours of work for academic staff members in the Instructor category shall not exceed 40 hours per week or the equivalent on a monthly or annual basis..."

Simply put, an instructor's normal hours of work are not to exceed 40 hours a week. Since instruction is not a nine-to-five type of job, an instructor will often have to work more than 40 hours a week. Sub-section 35.01 allows an instructor who has worked more than 40 hours in one week to work less than 40 hours in the following week, or if an instructor normally works more than 40 hours a week during the two semesters, they would then work less than 40 hours a week in May and June.

The Association is aware of instructors who have been told that they owe the Employer 40 hours a week during

May and June. This would be true only if the instructor had worked no more than 40 hours a week during the other eight months.

It is advisable for instructors to keep a record of all of the hours they have worked in order to verify that they have worked approximately 40 hours a week over the academic year.

When can classes be scheduled?

Classes can be scheduled at any time between 8:00 AM and 6:00 PM in a given day. This emphasizes the need for Sub-section 35.01 and also explains why the Collective Agreement does not mention an 8-hour day. The maximum number of class contact hours that can be assigned to an instructor on any given day is 6 hours.

What is a regular workday?

There is no reference to a regular workday in the Collective Agreement. An instructor's workday will vary depending on when their classes are scheduled, as well as the time required for preparation, evaluation, and all of the other duties that go into a smoothly run class environment.

Can an instructor work from home?

The Collective Agreement is silent on this contentious issue. Most instructors do a great deal of work at home. This work would include the class preparation you do in the evenings as well as the exams you mark on the weekends. (Remember these hours count towards your 40 hours a week under Sub-section 35.01).

At this time the employer is insisting that instructors are to be at SAIT during the work week. ♦♦

Take a Hike

by George Haeckel

It is once again the time of year to start thinking about getting out to the mountains to do some hiking. At this time of year, there are often some scenic routes that are snow-free unless we have one of our big snowstorms. One of my favourite spring routes is Prairie Mountain, which often is feasible in low-snow winter seasons. The way is steep but quite short. The total distance is 8 km return and you will gain about 700 m of elevation. Your reward (aside from the exercise) is a great view of the front ranges of the Rockies including several peaks over 3,000 m. If you take this trip later in May, many varieties of flowers can be found in the meadowy terrain above the tree line.

Directions to the trailhead:

Take Highway 22 to the junction with Highway 66. Head west to Elbow Falls (before May 15, this is the end of the road). Walk west along the highway for a hundred meters or so to the creek flowing into the Elbow River. The trail goes up the steep bank on the east side of the creek. It rises steeply for a few hundred meters and then levels off a bit for a half a kilometer or so. The trail rises steeply again until you reach the tree line. Here the gradient eases a bit for the last half a kilometer or so to the summit. ♦♦

SAFAGRAM**Editorial Board**

Hilde Clovechok
Stewart Hall
Heather Sagan
Pat Squibb
Wendy Strashok
B.J. Hamilton—Cartoonist

Layout

Luda Paul

Printed by

Quick Print Graphic Services

SAFAGRAM is published by the SAIT Academic Faculty Association (SAFA) five times a year on or about the first days of October, December, February, April, and June. Deadline for submissions is the 10th of the month preceding publication. Send submissions to SAFAGRAM, care of the SAFA office, N201 or e-mail submissions to luda.paul@sait. Please keep submissions under 300 words, double space. Submissions may be edited for grammar, length, or content.

SAFAGRAM editorial policy, as approved by the SAFA Executive on June 14, 1995, is as follows:

1. The Editorial Board has the final say as to what is included or deleted from the newsletter.
2. Editorial Board decisions about newsletter material must be agreed to by consensus.
3. The newsletter will include a disclaimer stating that the views expressed in its content do not necessarily represent the views of the Editorial Board or SAFA.
4. All material included in the newsletter must:
 - be signed by the author when submitted to the editors but anonymity may be requested and granted for printing.
 - be based on "reasoned argument" if personal criticism is used.
 - not involve name-calling.
 - not include sexist, racist, or homophobic comments.
 - be related to SAIT, although this will be interpreted broadly.

The views expressed in SAFAGRAM do not necessarily represent the views of the Editorial Board or SAFA.

Bridging the Credibility Gap
continued from page 1

managers will try to fix employees through training, motivational programs, new technologies, management fads of the week, or coaching (read discipline). None of these really attack the credibility problem. Morale slides further as the we/they gap widens.

'Blame storming'

When things go wrong, weak managers too often try to fix the blame rather than the problem. They point fingers and lay guilt rather than take responsibility, seek out root causes of problems and fix them. Research has shown that the vast majority of defects, errors, service breakdowns and such originate in an organization's systems, processes or structure. Yet, many managers look to blame their people rather than their processes. They will, for example, implement performance appraisal systems to hold individual employees accountable for what are actually systemic shortfalls controlled by management. Such actions do nothing to foster trust.

Confusing information and communication

Information dumps are often e-mail or presentation monologues filled with factual reporting and impersonal language that talk at people. But trust and credibility are built more on emotions and feelings. They are issues of the heart, not the head. Bridge-building communication involves verbal, two-way dialogue that exchanges points of view, pays attention to what people have to say and connects their shared values and goals. Too many organizations are drowning in information while thirsting for communication.

Open doors and closed minds

Weak leaders don't like to be challenged or confront tough situations. They will proudly declare an open-door policy while actually dissuading any employees from walking through it. So people tiptoe around sensitive issues or keep their real opinions confined to huddled hallway discussions. The we/they gap widens as people stop having real conversations and start saying what's politically correct or what the boss wants to hear. Problems fester until they explode with devastating consequences.

Avoiding feedback about themselves

Managers with low credibility often don't realize that their declarations, promises and threats aren't believed and just pour more gasoline onto the fires of organizational cynicism. These managers don't seek honest and open feedback on their own behaviour. They delude themselves into believing that acquiescence is agreement. Then they bitterly complain about their employees' resistance to change and apathy for innovation and improvement. The we/they gap is everyone else's fault. There are no quick and easy ways to close credibility gaps. But here are some things that the strongest and most credible leaders do:

Listen up

Closing the credibility gap can be helped by developing regular—at least annual, better more often—processes to gauge real employee perceptions about their managers' level of leadership as well as other issues, including morale,

obstacles to higher performance, pet peeves or key irritants. And then managers must pay attention to the findings and demonstrate real commitments to act on them. When actions speak louder than words, employees will have more reason to trust those above them.

Reach across the great divide

It's hard to build credibility from a cloistered office. So spend very little time there. Don't summon people to your quarters—seek them out in theirs. Hold meetings in common rooms—the more visible, the better—and spend lots of time with employees on the front line as well as customers, suppliers and partners. Familiarity and informality brings people closer.

Get their input

Run a continuing series of breakfasts, lunches, town-hall meetings, shop-floor conferences and the like. Take this time to ask for feedback, concerns, and suggestions. Keep things informal. Openly share information and treat everyone as key partners. A simple question such as, "What's the dumbest thing we do around here?" can produce powerful insights. Then make use of what you hear. And make sure your employees know you are doing that.

Run two-way meetings

Many meetings widen credibility gaps between managers and employees because they are heavy on informing and light on communicating. Employees often see meetings as top-down, self-serving forums pushing management's goals, needs, and agenda.

Effective meetings engage all participants in open conversations identifying problems on both sides—management and employees—and then bring everyone together to solve them. This is where strong managers find out what's hindering the people on the frontlines of customer service and figure out how to better serve those servers.

Stop trying to 'motivate'

Manipulating or "motivating" employees emphasizes and widens the gap with management. To motivate is to treat employees as children, rather than as partners working together to meet mutually rewarding goals—a better workplace, happy customers and delighted shareholders.

Be approachable

Be very careful how you handle bad news or dissenting opinions. A wince, a sharp question or irritated body language can send powerful signals that you only want people to tell you good news or what they think you want to hear. If you often find that you're not told about problems until they have mushroomed into giant issues, that likely means approaching you is seen as high risk. Or it indicates that your credibility for taking proactive action is so low, no one bothers. In either case, you need to get unvarnished feedback through anonymous surveys, focus groups or interviews run by trusted third parties, or an insider who will tell you what people in your team are really saying.

Be radical

Don't just get out of your office, eliminate it—especially

“Weak leaders don't like to be challenged or confront tough situations.”

LIBRARY REPORT



by Dave Weber (284-8476) and
Nora Robinson (210-4073)

- ⇒ Did you owe the Library money for overdue books? March 7-13 was the time to visit us to pay off those fines. We offered students and staff the opportunity to reduce their fine by paying 50% of their fine as a donation to the Save Our Students fund. The other 50% was waived. The Save Our Students fund, administered by the SAIT counseling staff, provides financial assistance to second-year students who experience unexpected financial difficulties and would, if not helped, be forced to drop out of classes. As of March 10, we had raised \$155 for the fund, with three days left to go in our Fine Forgiveness Week.
- ⇒ The Library hosted two student work displays in January and February. The ArchitEXPO was on display from January 20 to February 18. Second-year Architecture 361 students worked in design teams to create an interpretive pavilion based on themes such as a prominent architect or designer, historic architectural styles, or cultural building traditions. This was the second year for this display in the Library. In February, the second-year photojournalism students displayed their work. Each student in the course selected five of their best photos. As in the previous two years, the photos ranged in subject from sports to nature to portraits. The students and their instructors were invited to receptions to open both displays.
- ⇒ To facilitate better traffic flow in the Level 1 south end of the Library, the reference collection has been reduced in size and two rows of reference shelves removed. The Library will make further improvements to this area in the late spring. The shelf height will be reduced to about 150 cm, and the new rows of low shelves will be reoriented north-south. This will create a space with better sightlines from both the inside and outside of the Library.
- ⇒ Library staff presented three library liaison service presentations to Transportation and Construction instructors at Mayland Heights and Buck Crump campuses in early March. The two SAIT branch campuses currently do not have on-site library staff. The Art Smith Aero Centre has library space and a collection (but no library staff). The presentation included details about how the main campus library can support information needs of students and instructors through services such as intercampus loans.
- ⇒ On March 2, Zahina Iqbal and the library research group invited the CALS faculty to an introduction to the **myLibrary** part of the Faculty Resource Centre. This

section of the mySAIT website includes a list of reference websites and a reading room. Visit the reading room to find lists of SAIT library resources and free on-line journals and magazines that will help you stay current with teaching and learning topics. If you want more information, please contact Zahina at local 7387.

- ⇒ To enable students in the English Language Foundations program and anyone else struggling to locate library material, the growing collection of materials in the field of English as a second language will be marked with ESL stickers and shelved adjacent to the stairway on Level 0, rather than in the general lending collection.
- ⇒ We continue our displays of works from the Alberta Foundation of the Arts with the showing of the "Fortunes of a Wild Land" photography exhibit by Robert Pierce Butler. The black and white photos were on display in the Library until April 15. ♦

Bridging the Credibility Gap
continued from page 3

if it's bigger and more private than those of the people in the organization you lead. Doing so would be an example of one courageous and dramatic step toward narrowing we/they gaps.

Management offices are too often powerful symbols of separation and hierarchy (not to mention useless overhead costs). It's so easy today to carry your office with you in your notebook computer, cell phone, BlackBerry, etc. Use whatever shared workspaces, cubicles, and meeting rooms are available. Hold most of your one-on-one discussions in the other person's workspace.

Originally published in *The Globe & Mail*. For over 25 years Jim Clemmer's practical leadership approaches have been inspiring action and achieving results. His 2,000+ presentations and workshops/retreats, five bestselling books, columns, and newsletters are helping hundreds of thousands of managers worldwide. Jim Clemmer is a bestselling author and internationally acclaimed keynote speaker, workshop/retreat leader, and management team developer on leadership, change, customer focus, culture, teams, and personal growth. During the last 25 years he has delivered over two thousand customized keynote presentations, workshops, and retreats. Jim's five international bestselling books include *The VIP Strategy*, *Firing on All Cylinders*, *Pathways to Performance*, *Growing the Distance*, and *The Leader's Digest*. His web site is www.clemmer.net. ♦

High-Maintenance Students

Does the title resonate with you? Do you think you might have one or two? Would you describe them as those students who complain and whine beyond reasonable limits? Do they sap your energy? Are they the students you most happily see go at the course's end?

High-maintenance employees have been studied, but not high-maintenance students. However, as Lisa A. Burke observes in this initial exploration of the topic (reference below), "for most college instructors, it is no strain to generalize this construct to the instructional setting." (p. 744) Burke uses research on personality profiles to predict high-maintenance students, offers several research propositions, and makes some early suggestions as to how faculty can constructively deal with students like these.

High-maintenance students often look quite the opposite when they first present themselves to teachers. They appear to be extremely conscientious and motivated. They are among the first students to show up during office hours. They ask questions and want to discuss assignments in detail. But at some point what appeared to be interest and dedication turn into something less constructive. Perhaps you returned a quiz on which the student scores 9.8 out of 10. The student follows you to the office, asking for repeated explanation of why the .2 of a point was taken off. They express disappointment and frustration, seemingly unable to reckon with the fact they still got an A. Next the student may express concern about being placed in a group with certain other students, some of whom she just knows don't "like" her. Then there are personal issues, illness or family problems, that spawn requests for deadline extensions and discussions of difficulties in other courses. And on and on it goes.

Based on personality research, Burke proposes that high-maintenance students are most likely those who rate high on conscientiousness—individuals who are described as methodical, achievement oriented, diligent, organized, exacting, and purposeful—and those who rate low on agreeableness. Those with that combination of traits are characterized as being strict, rigid, industrious, hard, and deliberate. "These students are unlikely to be considerate or cooperative ... and at the same time are likely to maintain high expectations and definitive prescriptions ... for their own school-related outcomes (grades)." (p. 750)

Burke cautions that the predisposition many academics have to help and support students allow them to be easily drawn into responding to the needs of these students. A situation of co-dependency may result where the student needs a lot of help and the faculty member supplies a lot of help. The problem here is that the more help the faculty member gives, the more the student needs. It's a vicious circle.

Based on research with managers, Burke recommends that faculty members help these students to find their own solutions. The teacher provides general direction, resources, and tools. This prevents the high-maintenance student from dumping his or her incessant concerns on the instructor to solve.

Burke worries that this kind of student is not likely to be successful in the workplace, and so it is important that teachers help them gain insight into their behaviors. She cites research that documents how few managers have an accurate self-understanding and suggests that inexperienced students likely have even less insight. She recom-

mends self-awareness tools as well as "straightforward, honest, specific behavioral feedback" (p. 752) as to the affects of those high-maintenance behaviors.

Perhaps it is comforting to know that high-maintenance behaviors try the patience and test the mettle of virtually all college teachers. Students like these daily confront us with the fact that sometimes the most important lessons we need to teach/learn have nothing to do with course content.

Reference: Burke, L. A. (2004). High-maintenance students: A conceptual exploration and implications. *Journal of Management Education*, 28 (6), 743-756.

Reprinted from *The Teaching Professor* by permission from Magna Publications, Inc., Madison, Wis. www.magnapubs.com. Subscriptions and submissions at custserv@magnapubs.com. ♦♦



apexcreditunion.com

... your on-campus financial solution!

Apex Credit Union has been serving the financial needs of Calgarians for more than 60 years, and for 38 of those years, we have been looking after the financial needs of our members right here on your SAIT campus. Located in the Crandell Building, we are a full-service financial institution that offers a complete range of products and services to meet your needs. Did you know that Apex Credit Union employs 3 Financial Planners ready to assist you with the design of your financial plan?

We are celebrating spring with our "3.95" campaign. Drop by our branch any weekday between 9:00-4:00 and ask one of our staff members about our spring specials. Whether you are in the market for a new car or home, or want to take that well-deserved summer vacation, Apex Credit Union looks forward to helping you meet your financial goals.

SAFA Annual Elections

by Shoab Nasir

SAFA elections are just around the bend. Use this opportunity to get involved and help determine SAFA's direction.

These elections are very important for SAFA. In the next year or two, when some seasoned SAFA Executive members retire, a good deal of experience and corporate memory will be lost to us. In the interest of continuity and succession planning, SAFA needs new faces, but most of all, it needs rejuvenation—a dose of fresh ideas blended with the experience of seasoned SAFA Executive members.

Positions on the SAFA Executive are a one-year term. Amongst other things, the Executive Committee manages the business and affairs of the Association. The committee meets for two hours each Wednesday, and a time constraint is accommodated for instructor schedules. At these meetings, the Executive Committee discusses potential opportunities that SAIT can capitalize on to improve the SAIT community in general and faculty members in particular. To help arrive at a common understanding of

such development opportunities, the SAFA Executive uses available channels of discussions, negotiations, grievance, and arbitration as the circumstances dictate, until the best interests of all SAIT stakeholders are met. The fact, however,

remains that the amazing edifice of such joyous accomplishments can only be built by means of your continual participation and support.

In addition to the positions on the SAFA Executive, one position of faculty representative to the Board of Governors will be available, as well as three positions on Academic Council. The faculty representatives to the Board of Governors and Academic Council serve two-year terms.

Run for the SAFA Executive positions without any fear of reprisal. Section 8 of the SAIT/SAFA Collective Agreement stipulates "The Employer and the Association agree that there shall be no discrimination or coercion exercised or practiced with respect to any academic staff member for reason of membership or legitimate activity in the Association." ♦

“SAFA needs new faces, but most of all, it needs rejuvenation—a dose of fresh ideas blended with the experience of seasoned SAFA Executive members.”

*“It’s not what the teacher says,
It’s what the student hears.”*

- Unknown

