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Implementing Lean Marketing Systems

Creating a Great Workplace

Guest was Ed Muzzio, author of Make Work Great

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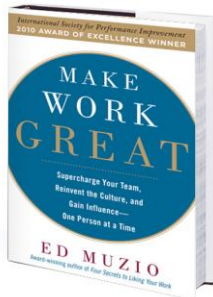
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Ed Muzio, president and CEO of [Group Harmonics](#) was our guest on the Business901 Podcast. Group Harmonics provides *Analytical Solutions Maximizing Human Potential*. Our programs are designed to analytically address specific and often measurable aspects of individuals and teams. We help our clients create realistic strategies to improve performance based upon actual strengths, weaknesses, and environmental or cultural conditions.



Ed's analytical approach to human productivity has been featured [in national and international media](#), including CBS, Fox Business News and The New York Post; he is a regular guest on CBS Interactive. With clients ranging from individual life coaches to the Fortune 500, he serves as an advisor and educator to professionals at all levels, all over the world. Prior to founding Group Harmonics, Ed was President and Executive Director of a human services organization, and a leader, mentor, and technologist within Intel Corporation and the Sematech consortium.

Ed is the author [Make Work Great: Super Charge Your Team, Reinvent the Culture, and Gain Influence One Person at a Time](#) and of the award-winning book [Four Secrets to Liking Your Work: You May Not Need to Quit to Get the Job You Want](#) (FT Press, 2008).

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Joe Dager: Welcome everyone. This is Joe Dager, the host of the Business901 podcast. With me today is Ed Muzio, the author of "Make Work Great." Ed, could you tell me what you do and what prompted you to write a book?

Ed Muzio: Good morning. Thanks for having me here. I wrote "Make Work Great" last year as a response to the feedback I got from my first book. My first book was "Four Secrets to Liking Your Work." There was a small subset of people who read it and said to me basically, "This is great stuff, but I can't do it where I work because the other people are so messed up." I started to say to them, "Well, if that's the case, you should probably quit," and they would say, "I can't quit." And I would say, "Well, then, try something," and they would say, "Well, I can't try anything, they're too messed up." I started to say, "Well, then don't talk to me, because I don't know what to tell you." My co-author on the first book convinced me that you can't say, "Go away and don't talk to me," when someone has a problem. She started talking to me about what people could do, and I started to show it to her. She said, "We have to write another book."

"Make Work Great" is really a collection of my research and experiences that are behaviors anyone can practice at any level that will tend to make the workplace better without getting their manager or their peers or anybody else to do anything differently, assuming they can't really do that. Its stuff you can do yourself. That feeds into what I do in my practice, which is more output and less stress in the information age workplace, I believe that the workplace has changed in the last 20 years, and we haven't caught up to it yet. The reason we are all so stressed out is because we haven't caught up to the reality of new work. My purpose in my firm is to help companies, and individuals catch

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up and work the way they need to, to be successful and not stressed today.

Joe: Well, your company is Group Harmonics. I didn't say that at the beginning there, but that is the name of your organization. When you say work has changed, what's changed about it, what are we doing different nowadays?

Ed: Well, if you imagine the workplace prior to the information age, before email, before fax, before all the stuff we take for granted now. Basically, work was more or less linear. So if you imagine a picture of five or six dots in a row with lines connecting them. That was work. You were a dot; someone passed you some work, and you did it and passed it along. If you were a manager, maybe you could see a couple of different lines. You could see 10 or 12 people or more, but it was all very linear. Now, thanks to the information age, everything is connected to everything else. So if you work in sales, let's say, and something happens in an industry similar to yours in a legal ruling, in a state adjacent to yours today, you are expected to do things a little differently tomorrow to compensate for that. Or if you work with customer service and product development sends you an email today, you're expected to do something different tomorrow because of that.

Everything is interconnected, and the picture is no longer a line, it's now almost like, imagine if you try to draw a spider web with your eyes closed and so it came out very irregular and very messy. That's the picture. Everything is interconnected in a web and so things like org charts and patterns that have been used for years in the workplace; they don't really capture the essence of what's going on anymore.

Joe: It's interesting that you use the spider web as an example, because that's what I tell people in sales and marketing anymore. That you take a web, and you have a hub there of who you are,

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you can identify that as the individual and then you overlay everybody else's web over you. Your strongest influencers are the strength of the connections between all of the nodes in the web. I take that you say that is how you are managed, too. It's the strength of that next connection to you is how you are being managed. Is that ...

Ed: That's it. Yes, you used the same words as I did; the nodes are the people and the links are the communication pads and whoever you are and whatever level you're at, you are surrounded by a messy, irregular network of people and the strongest communications are those that are closest to you and are influencing you the most. You have to recognize; it's not linear and it's not well defined.

Joe: It definitely not because they can come out of nowhere, and it really is difficult as a team member. You may be part of a team over here and I'll go into my Lean Six Sigma background, we have Kaizen events where everybody comes in, and they work on this great issue and they pull everybody in from different parts of the organization to get feedback and then they come up with this grand plan on what to do. Then the whole meeting breaks apart and it's ..

Ed: It's over.

Joe: It's over and how are you going to accomplish all that because there's no direct influence or no direct hierarchy that is going to make that thing work? It's got to be more by influence than it can be by command and control, let's say.

Ed: Exactly, and that's the thing, the command and control structures, they don't work. You can say they're good or bad, and you can argue that, but they just don't work in this reality. With everything interconnected to everything else. I can give you an example. People from across the company come together in a

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meeting, make some agreements and then go apart. How do those agreements happen? They can't happen through command and control because the command and control structure wasn't there. The fact of the matter is; it's those kinds of meetings that are driving all the activity in today's information age workplace. Command and control can't be at all of them, because there can't be enough people at that level, so what happens is the system has to work differently.

Joe: "Make Work Great" figures this all out for me?

Ed: It certainly helps. It certainly gives individuals at every level some patterns of activity they should practice that will basically enhance their output and reduce their stress. It's stressful for everyone in that situation, like the situation you just mentioned. It's stressful for the people who want those results to get done; it's stressful for the people that were in the meeting who now have no support from their manager but still need to do these things. This is all about making the network work; the new network work to produce those outputs without stressing everybody out or overwhelming everybody.

Joe: Are you saying this is widespread that this is what's going on with everybody now?

Ed: Well, the information age is here. Tell me this, do you know anybody who works that doesn't have a phone or gets email anymore. It doesn't really happen, right? We're all in this new world. We're all interconnected in this new way. We're all on Facebook; we're all on Twitter, and whatever, so that is the new workplace. It may be there are little pockets of isolated bits, but for the most part, we're all working that way now, like it or not.

Joe: The hierarchy, the org chart, you've even talked about burning the org chart, but there's still hierarchy within an organization.

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Ed: There is. There's hierarchy; there's accountability and it's there and that's fine. I don't mean to say there's no such thing as a boss or a leader. What I mean to say is information moves differently and assignments are made differently, and decisions are made differently that they used to be. The org chart itself is from the mid 1800's. It was originally used in the construction of the railway across America, so that's a very linear, very hierarchical process. You have supervisors; you have people that lay rail, etc. It doesn't work in today's complex companies, as anything other than a phone tree. I can tell you whom you work for, I can tell you who writes your review in an org chart, but the org chart shows me nothing about who influences your work, because there's usually five to eight other people that are pushing on you that don't appear in your org chart.

Joe: This might be tough to do. I don't know if you can give me a synopsis of the book, but this is a pretty grand picture that we're talking here. It sounds good, but in practicality, how do you put it in practice and how do you do it?

Ed: Well for an overview, basically the book is in three sections. The first section is about you, what you can do things you can practice. That's the core of the whole thing. We say it starts with you, meaning there are some things you can do differently. I can give you some examples of that, if you like, once I give you an overview. The second section is about growing your influence, so as you practice this behavior, these different things, people will start to pick up on them. Not because you're saying you have to do it this way, but because when you see someone do something that works, you tend to copy it. So when people see you doing things that work, they'll tend to copy it. Over time that will lead you to section three, which is how to be a leader within what I call a cultural crystal, within this set of new patterns.

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Section three is about how to manage the fact that your influence will increase. It all starts with that core, section one, which is, you have to practice some different patterns of behavior in order to improve your workplace and also to effect a change in it.

Joe: You really have to sit down and say, "This is what's influencing me," and look at your mental model. You have to see those influences and how you are handling it and really recognize what's happening to you in your situation, first, right?

Ed: You have to pay attention to what is going on around you. The patterns of behavior that I'm advocating, by the way, are not complex. It's not that you need to spend hours doing this. It's things that you can do in five minutes when you think of it, so that over time you start to build these new behaviors. Honestly speaking, if I tell you, "Hey, Joe, the best thing in the world you can do, do this, it'll take you four hours a day." You're not going to do it. You don't have time, but if I say, "Do this, it'll take you five minutes. Do it every day for a week, "you might try it. If you try it and it works, it'll stick. That's the only way to effect a change, again it's the only thing people have time to do.

Joe: Can you give me an example of a couple of things you might tell me?

Ed: One of my favorites is what I call Verbalize Summary Objectives or VSOs. That sounds complicated, but all it is, is a way of talking about your work. If you listen in most workplaces right now to people talking about their work, they tend to talk about process. By that, I mean; they'll tell you how busy they are, they'll tell you how many meetings they have, they'll tell you how they had to travel last week, they'll tell you how the business processes are difficult. That's what the content will be. What a VSO is, it's a way instead, of talking about your work in terms of your output. So instead of saying to you, "Hey, Joe, I spent two hours in meetings this week trying to do something with

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customers, " I would say, "You know what Joe, one of the things I am working on is, I have one customer who needs to increase their output on their production line by 20%, and I'm working on that with them. My job is to help them do those." You can get as specific as you want. The VSO is almost like you're the elevator pitch from sales where you talk in 90 seconds about your companies' value.

It's just like that, only you talk in 90 seconds about your own output. So if you start to do that, the next time you open your mouth to tell someone how busy you are, instead you start to talk about the output you are producing. What that does, if you look at it from a system, is it starts to educate the people around you in that network that we talked about, as to what you are actually doing. If you start to do that, people will understand what you're doing, they'll stop asking you to do things that you're not working on and over time, if everyone starts to repeat that behavior, the system gets smarter. In other words, everyone knows what everyone is doing so new work will get routed more efficiently. That's one simple thing you can do, it takes no more time than the time you already spend talking about what you are doing, but it makes the system more efficient, more effective.

Joe: That's quite interesting. Heck, I'm going to try that out today.

Ed: Please do! Actually, there's a video on the MakeWorkGreat.com website, there's a video called, "Say No without Saying No." It's just about that. You can take a look at that, too.

Joe: I can get a lot of things accomplished; it's tough working within a team. Are you telling me now that I need to work as a team?

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Ed: Well, you don't have to, unless you have to, but usually, you have to. What I mean by that is, the work we do is so complex, we can't do it alone. The example I always use is and it's in the book is, if I said to you, "Here is three wooden blocks, build me a structure optimized for height and stability." You would stack them up and be done. You wouldn't convene a committee. But if I said to you, "Here is 400 wooden blocks in various colors. Please build a structure optimized for height and stability, you might turn to the person next to you and say, "What is he talking about?" Right and look for a little help. If I say to you we are going to build a high-rise downtown, we'd optimize it for height, stability, code, meeting the codes, it needs to be aesthetically pleasing, and it's to fit the footprint of the space. All of a sudden, you don't have a choice. You have to work in a group. You just can't do it, and that's why we work in groups. It's not because it's so fun or because it's the best thing ever. It's because we have to use other people and work with them together in order to accomplish the complex results we are trying to accomplish.

Joe: Difficulties of working with groups is that they're not across the hallway from you anymore. They could be across the ocean from you.

Ed: Absolutely, and virtualization carries its own challenges. One of the things we know is that it takes about 30 days for you to begin to suspect someone in a negative way. So if you have no positive interactions with someone for about 30 days, if all you have is work interactions, we somehow, our brain naturally turns to a defensive mode. What we need to do to combat that, is we need to make sure we are having some sort of personal, positive interactions and personal connections with people, whether it's over the phone or by email or whatever, on a frequent basis. Otherwise, our actions and activities begin to get misinterpreted in a negative way, and it's just human, that's just how it is.

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Joe: So you're saying that we should make a point that there's some type of interaction within all our teams, I mean I go back to the Scrum thing, they have the Scrum daily meeting, and that would be pretty difficult with the stand-up meeting - even if it's virtual or in person - to get disconnected, because you always have some type of current connection going on.

Ed: That certainly helps. One of the things that I talk about is a model I call ICE, which has to do with the people that are most influential on your work. You want to do three things - one is identify; you want to be very clear about who are the five to eight people who are most influential on your work, and most important to your output. The second thing is C, which is connect - you want to begin to build a personal relationship with them, so even if you're in the Scrum every day, once a week shoot them an email afterwards and say, hey, how are things, or whatever, just try and maintain some kind of personal connection.

That's because of the third one, E, which is explain. You want to be in a position to teach those people what you're doing in some way, like with the 92nd elevator pitch, for example, so that they begin to understand all the things that you're working on; again, so that when you don't necessarily meet every single one of their requirements, they won't like it, but they will at least understand why.

This is not a technique for shirking responsibility but the fact of the matter is, we can't do everything that's on us, and when we miss important things for someone else, it's much better to let them know it's going to happen in advance, than it is to just sort of surprise them by not doing it.

When that happens, when we surprise somebody by not doing something expected, we get into a place where they end up

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micro-managing us more, paying more attention to us, bothering us more, and that's just negative for everyone involved.

Joe: Getting back to the book a second. Is it a book that's full of charts telling me what to do, or is it something I can sit down and read?

Ed: It's pretty specific. You can certainly sit down and read it on a plane. Someone told me they read it on an airplane ride. It must have been kind of a long ride, or they're a fast reader, because it's a couple hundred pages, but it goes pretty fast. The thing is; it's a lot of very specific things, like, for example, I just explained to you the bit about the VSO, the 90 second elevator pitch. That is part of chapter two. In chapter two, there are five other things that you can do at that level of five minute type activities - things to talk about, things to pay attention to. So you can read it all once, or you can read three pages and go try something and see what you think, it's kind of up to you.

Joe: Is this something that I could do in isolation, or do I need to buy a book for the rest of my team members?

Ed: I'd like it if you buy the book for the rest of your team, certainly! Buying the book for the rest of your team members - what that does is it gives you a common language to talk about doing it, and that can be very useful. On the other hand, there's nothing that says anyone else has to do anything in this book, it's all about you. So, in fact, the title of one of the sections is, it starts with you. So you could do it in isolation if you wanted to, you could buy the book, read it and start doing it and just see what happens. There's nothing in the book that will create a negative impact; most of what's in there will either create a positive impact or won't be necessary. So it's something you can pass around to your team, or not.

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Joe: You wrote this book as an extension of your previous book. To put it in practice, does it benefit someone to read your previous book?

Ed: It does, in the sense that it's not really an extension; it's actually different concepts. The first book was about - almost like lenses you can wear to see what's going on around you, with you and your job and you and other people. So it was ways to interact better with others and to interact better with your job, if you imagine that your job has some sort of personality, what it wants from you. This book is a lot more specific as to things you can do to make your individual output and your local group output more effective. So they complement each other but it's not a sequel.

Joe: I have to compliment you, you did a great job on the videos on your website, explaining different terms and it's on the Group Harmonics website?

Ed: That's correct, yes, thank you.

Joe: It really gives some insight about you what you're talking about. Do you go out and train companies in these methods, then?

Ed: I do. If you hit the seminars page and the speeches page on the GroupHarmonics.com website, you'll see that there's quite a bit there. I have our most recently released product is; I actually have a one-day class based upon the new book. It's called "Make Work Great, Patterns for Output and Effectiveness." I both train directly into corporations, and I also train the trainers, in which I teach people inside of companies or individual practitioners to teach the class themselves. That lets me leverage the material a little more broadly than I could if I was doing it all myself. I appreciate your comments on the videos. The videos actually are part of the training. I'm doing something unique in that the videos are free. They're out there on the website; anyone can

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watch them. They're also incorporated into the training. The reason I like that, is because if someone attends the training, we use some of the videos in the training, and they want to go back and get a refresher, they just go hit the website and watch it again. There's no complex registration or anything; they just go there and watch it, and they can also share it with someone who wasn't in the class and say, "Hey, look at this. What do you think of this pattern? What do you think of this activity that kind of thing?" Each video lasts no more than about four minutes, and you should walk away with it with something you can use. That's our vision. They're produced by CBS, and that's their vision, too. We do that very carefully. So, thank you.

Joe: What have you found that has made teamwork difficult for people to manage? What's been one of the key things that they've had to learn about themselves to be able to manage the new work place?

Ed: One of the things that I see people constantly tripping over and it's something that we've been talking about for decades, but we're still having a hard time doing it, is meetings. Just put people in a room together and get something done. Some of what I wrote about in "Make Work Great." I put a chapter on how to write a meeting specification, which is like an agenda, only complete. I'm amazed at how many companies and really, really effective companies, if you look at what they're doing in the space of meetings, they're still just throwing people in a room together and seeing what happens. It's a tremendous waste of time; it's disheartening, and it's problematic in a lot of ways.

One of the things you can do as individuals say if I'm in charge of a meeting if I'm responsible for a meeting, I'm going to spend at least as long as the meeting is going to last in prep, in getting ready, in laying out the agenda and laying out who's going to be there and the details to make sure that the flow goes correctly.

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People don't like to do that, and I can't say I blame them, but you really have to.

Joe: It's still about preparation.

Ed: In the meetings, it absolutely is. Preparation is more than just writing it out, "We're going to get together and talk about this," and sending out an email. Preparation is things like the decision making process, right. How are we going to make decisions? When we come to a complex decision, is it a vote, is it a manager wins kind of a thing? There's no right answer. In fact, I put a video up called "Group Decision Making That Works." It's on the website, as well, about different methods for that. There's no right one way to do it; it's just that you have to do it. Somehow you have to make that decision in advance. Similar with the agenda, there's not one right agenda, but you have to decide in advance and be very clear what you're going to do and what you expect to get out of each piece of it. It's the same thing about purpose, know what you are going to get out of each piece of it in advance and tell people, " This is what we are going to do, " so that everyone is on the same page.

Joe: Someone told me years ago that winging it is for amateurs.

Ed: I like that.

Joe: I thought that kind of hits home doesn't it?

Ed: It is, and it's a misconception that if I'm in charge, I can put everyone together and say, "Now do it." Being in charge is about facilitating outputting groups. That's not always so easy to do. It certainly doesn't happen by itself.

Joe: One of the things that I always have a problem with is everybody wants to talk about the culture. I want to make sure I'm going to turn the key tomorrow and flip the light switch on,

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and the lights are going to come on. That's what's important, should I worry about culture in an economy like this?

Ed: I think you should, but I think you're also right. A lot of people use the word culture as a catch-all for morale and how we feel and whether we like it here and what's going on and whether the managers are nice to us, and that kind of thing and that's fine, but some of that matters more than others in terms of when you're in a tough economy. The definition I like of culture is I use the definition from the guy who invented the term, which is Edgar Schein of MIT Sloan. He said culture is a set of patterns of activity, practices that we used in the past because they worked to solve our problems that we now teach to each other in the present. Culture is how we do things and specifically, it's how we used to do things that we keep doing.

In that regard, if it's a down economy, if we're facing the challenges we're facing right now, you better be darn sure that the way you're doing things match the reality of today and not how we used to do things. From that regard, I would say culture is directly related to whether or not you're going to have lights to turn on tomorrow.

Joe: You're basically saying that I'd better attach the things that I'm doing to today to today's reality, and if there's any sort of disconnect there at all, I either change or investigate why.

Ed: Exactly. The other thing I heard you say, you said, I'm a little nervous talking to consultants about culture, is there are a lot of people who advocate a plan for culture change that sounds very good, and it sounds something like this: We're going to do a full analysis of the current culture; we're going to do a gap analysis, and we're going to implement programs to make the changes we need. The problem is that a culture is an organic system, like growing a tree. You can plant a seed and grow a tree, and you can exert some control over where and how the

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tree grows, but you cannot pre-draw the limbs and expect the tree to comply with that. You cannot do a gap analysis on where the branches are or aren't and expect the tree to comply with that.

The way to change a culture is not to implement programs on top of what's there; it's to get people doing different things. Back to the "Make Work Great" book is what it's about. It's about individual things people can do that will tend to become new cultural patterns because they'll get picked up...

Joe: Because they work.

Ed: Yes, you're right. Do things that work for today and do them in such a way that other people will copy them. That's how you change the culture. Don't worry too much about a full gap analysis on culture because you can't specify it that way.

Joe: I think that's a great analogy of the tree because what you made me think of is that if I want to have this pre-defined culture out there, I'm going to sit there and start putting braces as the tree is growing and pushing these limbs and try to space them out and get them all the way I want them. They are going to fight me, aren't they?

Ed: They're going to fight you, and they're still not going to look like what you want, right?

Joe: That's a great analogy to it, because I have to nurture it along and you kind of take what you get to a little bit. You can influence it, but you have to move along and take what you get to build a healthy tree.

Ed: Exactly. It's a slow organic process to influence it, and you can influence it quite a bit over time, but you can't influence it all at once between today and tomorrow by doing a change

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program. You can't do a change program on your tree to have it be taller. It doesn't work.

Joe: If I'm sitting in this environment and I have a boss that's not cooperative or he doesn't understand the real world today. He's still in the command and control type mode. I'm sitting here with all these influences coming around me from all these different areas, is there something I can do about that?

Ed: Well, you have to do something. You can quit, or you can do something else, but you have to do something and what I advocate for is to start to do things that you can do. For example, start to train your boss about your work. One of the things going back to that VSO concept we talked about that 90-second commercial about your output, is that you can never sit down with your boss and say, "What am I supposed to be doing?" Because, most likely, he'll just get mad at you and say, "Why don't you know that?" Right? That's because questioning is verbally aggressive. When you ask someone a question, you put them on the spot to answer it, and your boss may not fully understand what you are doing, but if you ask that question, they feel compelled to answer it.

If I, however, sit down with my boss and say, "Here is what I'm working on," in about 90-seconds, "please edit it, if you see fit." I've just taught that boss all of what I'm doing and at the same time, I've given that boss control to say you can change it if you want to. If the boss says, "No, only do this, this and that." That's fine. I say, "OK, I'll do that." I go off and do it, and it turns out next week that causes problems, I come back and say, "You'll recall that I was doing these things, and you pointed me to here and now this is the result." You are essentially teaching that person, but you're doing it in a non-threatening way.

You can't go to your boss and say, "You're wrong. I can't do this. It's never going to work, "because they look at you and say

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you're not being a team player. Right, you're not taking direction. You can train them over time as to what the effects of their decisions are, and that's what you want to do.

Joe: Who did you write the book for, the individual person or the team leader?

Ed: Officially, it's written for managers, because the one advantage managers have in all of this is, as a manager, you actually can say, "You all need to practice these patterns." You can set expectations. If I want everyone to pay more attention to whose pushing on their work, I can ask them for a list. But the patterns work anyway. It works just as well if you're an individual contributor. You can use the pattern. You can show the people around you that you're using the pattern. The only difference is you can't force anyone to do it.

But, as I thought about it more after writing it, that's not necessarily a bad thing. Because the cultural piece of it means that people will adopt the patterns themselves if they work. And that's far more long lasting than people who do it because their manager told them to. So there are sort of advantages either way; I think.

Joe: Is there any good tips that you could help me with and especially something other than a daily meeting. I am talking more like a three day Kaizen event that you could maybe help me with that would help my next Kaizen event?

Ed: Well, I can give you a couple tips. One of them is about problem solving, and this can work in two days or in an hour depending on the problem that you're trying to solve. But there's a model for group problem solving that I actually did in another video on the website called "Solve it once". And basically that model says... I wish I had a whiteboard to draw it for you here in the air. But basically that model says that you start with a

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problem, you spread out to different interpretations of what's actually going on, and then narrow it down by getting data together until you have an agreement on the actual situation.

So you imagine the top half of an hour glass. You start at the top; it's narrow. That we know we have a problem, we agree. Then you get very divergent. No one agrees on what the problem is. Then you pull together some data, and you agree on, OK, this is the problem.

Then you move into the bottom half of the hour glass. Again, you begin to disagree on what is the solution, and you can disagree a lot over what is the solution. You can pull in the data. And you have to work through all that in order to get back to agreement at the very bottom where it comes together again to say, OK, this is the solution we are going to implement.

Now, that sounds pretty simple. First, define the problem, fight about it if you want to. Then agree on the problem. Then work on the solution. Fight about it if you want to, and then agree on the solution.

What typically happens is we agree that there is a problem and everyone pushes for their own answer. So it's like you're in the top half of the hour glass about half way down, then the wide part, right? Everyone's in a different direction. And then everyone fights until we finally pick the solution of the person who fought the hardest.

And that's not the same as a good group solution. That's just the person who talked the loudest or fought the hardest. And so what happens is we go off and implement that but we don't really agree with it and then we come back around and do the whole thing again.

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So good group problem solving is one tip I can give you. Make sure the problem is well defined, make sure you've gotten an agreement on it, and then have a second conversation about the solution separated on time and space on the agenda. If it's a one day meeting, do one in the morning and one in the afternoon.

Joe: That's kind of like a PDCA cycle (plan-do-check-act cycle) that you go through. So you're saying that you can do this all within a meeting but it's important to create a separation there, a distinct amount of time.

Ed: Yeah, exactly. You want to have a different time for defining the problem and defining the solution. And if it's not a complex problem you can do the whole thing in an hour. If it's a really big problem, it might take you several days. But, regardless, the way I like to think about it is you want to spend about 20 percent of the time actually coming to a conclusion, you want to spend about half the time just going around about what the problem is, and the rest of the time, about 30 percent, you want to spend in the middle there trying to figure out what the solutions are.

So, you start out, if it's a one day meeting; all morning should be just defining the problem, putting the data on the table, until we agree on what it is. Then after lunch, until about three o'clock, we want to be talking about different solutions. And then from three thirty to five, after the break, that's when we're going to come to the solution.

People tend to want to jump over that first part and go right to a solution, and what happens is you end up right back in the same meeting next week trying to solve it again.

Joe: Great way to structure a meeting, even like do it at the end of that day and leave that analysis or leave that time go so that we pick it up again in the morning and give everybody time to

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take a shower and drive home. That's when you get all the good ideas come anyway.

Ed: Even better go ponder for a while and come back.

Joe: The two things that I'm hearing resonate with other people and other methods in other methodologies out there lately is one is teamwork creates instant feedback. The collaboration of it created quality. That's why teamwork is so important. It is because you get that feedback. You have that hour glass that you are coming down and converging into a single solution. And it's a quality solution because you're just not operating in a vacuum.

Ed: You're actually working together. You're not just working alone in a group.

Joe: The other thing is iteration. It's a continuous effort that you're going through it, and you're feeding it back in and kind of redirecting it. You have to get it out to customers, get it out to the shop floor, get it out somewhere to the people that actually use it or a larger percentage of them use it and then have a way to get it back in the process.

Ed: That goes back, too, to our well defined outputs, right? One of your well defined outputs should be implementation. Sometimes "how are we going to implement it?" is a whole different conversation from that the solution is, and sometimes it's a whole different hourglass. You know, now the problem is how to implement this solution and we've got to cycle back on top of the hour glass and have a whole separate conversation about how to do that. Again that only happens if you're clear up front about your purpose, what you are trying to do. We are not just trying to solve it; we are trying to solve it and roll it out to the whole factory.

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Joe: I did not watch your video, but it struck me as something that was kind of different. What's the drama triangle?

Ed: The drama triangle. Everyone loves the drama triangle. The drama triangle says that there are three basic roles that you can play in an interaction to create drama. So if you picture a big giant triangle. At the bottom on one side of the triangle, you have the persecutor. And that is, "I am going to take advantage", right? On the other of the triangle is the victim, that's whom I take advantage of. And then at the top of the triangle comes in the rescuer who saves that day. And so, let's say, for example, I am a manager and I have two employees. And one of them comes to me and says, you know; other employee is supposed to give me some data every week so I can do my job, and he won't do it, and I asked him for it and he was mean and rude. So my inclination as a manager might be to say, well talk to him about that.

Well, what I have just done is I have set up a drama triangle. We have the person persecutor who is the other employee, we have the victim who's this employee, and we have me, the manager, who is going to come save the day.

So what happens? As a manager, I go talk to the other employee, and I say you better shape up; you better get your work done. And that employee says, OK, fine. And then that employee walks out and then what? Well, then that employee can go back to the first employee and say, you caused me a problem now you're going to have real trouble with me. And now they're the persecutor again.

So what you see, and you see this all the time in the workplace, is the roles change, right? We take on; I'll be the hero, then I'm the rescuer, then you're the victim. And we just switch around. And meanwhile works not getting done. And it's a common thing

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in work. I mean, I just told you the story. You can think of a drama that you've seen around you in work, right?

It's everywhere. What it is I like to think about it, we have been talking this time about that network that is human beings interacting in the workplace, the drama triangle is like a virus in the network. It basically specifies how everyone is going to act. We all take on these roles, and instead of doing work and moving information, we become drama machines. So the key to get out of that is to focus on better defined questions and focus on clearly planned interactions and when you see the drama coming up, to not get caught into it. Don't take any of those roles. Don't be a hero, don't be a victim, and don't be a persecutor. Instead go to: what is the question here? What are we trying to solve?

So in the example I gave you the question is: how can this employee get this data to do his work? It's not: why was that person so mean? Why won't he give it to me? Why is it so hard to work here? It's none of those things. It's just: how does this person get his data to do his job? Does he get it from that person? Does he get it from somewhere else?

When you notice that the emotional content doesn't match the factual content, in other words there's more emotion than there is need for it, that's a good sign you're in drama.

Joe: Let me play devil's advocate there a minute. I go to this other guy and let's say we get along great. We collaborate and we really solve the problem. Are we operating a vacuum that we are solving a problem for us? Where does that lead, someplace else then?

Ed: Well, everything at every level has implications everywhere else. That's the beauty of this new messy spider web network we're talking about. So it may be that you solve a problem for you, but you create a problem for someone else. However, you

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can't stop that. And so if you say I'm am not going to do anything until I am sure that it doesn't affect anything else, you'll never do anything. But if you and this other guy get together and solve the problem, and say, OK, now we have a way in which to get this data to another person. Then another problem arises; you can solve that problem with the same kind of tools.

That's what we are in this information workplace. We are problem solvers. We're all constant problem solvers. And part of what we have to do is get to be OK with the idea that problems are going to come up, and things are going to be uncertain and a little big vague sometimes and a little bit random sometimes and it's OK. It's not a failure on our part; it's just part of the workplace and our job is just to take the next best most intelligent step that we can, given the information we have and then see what happens.

Joe: That would be part of our elevator speech and maybe what we just solved. What output we have and if we're telling people about our outputs, the guy says, "yes, if you do that, but what's going to happen to me over here?"

Ed: Exactly. You've got it, exactly. That's the point of the whole VSO process is now this employee is talking about, you know, part of what I deliver is this data every week and someone hears that and says, "If you do that, that's going to cause us problems." Then we get to the next round of problem solving. That's what we're doing. We're advertising the output so people could attach to it. They can say, "That needs to be changed. That's OK. That's good. I can help you with that," and it moves the information to the right places in the network. That's exactly it.

Joe: Is your book a problem solving book?

Ed: I think it is. I think it is in the sense that if the problem you have is that you're over worked and over stressed and you feel

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like the environment you're in is not conducive to anything else, then it is. It helps you solve that problem by doing things you can do, rather than by sitting there and saying, "There's nothing I can do." So, absolutely, it is.

Joe: Do you think someone can really implement all these things? You talk about a lot of different things here. Can they implement this without training? Can they implement it by reading the book?

Ed: I think people can. I think people can do this work very easily with just reading the book and trying it. In fact, I have Facebook posts that say, "Hey, Ed, I tried this and you're a genius. This is great. This works." I just laugh because it's not really genius stuff. It's pretty straightforward stuff. It's just common sense applied. The point is anyone can do it. For example, since we're talking about the VSO this whole time, there's nothing in any workplace that I know of, that precludes you from talking about what you're working on. Right? Now maybe you can't talk about it with certain people or customers, but I've never heard of a workplace in which you're not allowed to tell your manager what you're working on. There's nothing to stop you. Go do it.

Joe: You do try and solve problems yourself, and you talk about the outputs. I mean; you readily explain what you are doing but does a manager look at the point you are making and that he's supposed to manage, and he's supposed to tweak it.

Ed: Well, that's part of it. You're teaching your manager what you're working on and giving your manager the opportunity to tweak it, if he or she needs to do that. You know one of the things that I hear a lot from people when they are unhappy at work is; they say, "My manager doesn't know what's going on, they're dumb; they're dopey. They don't understand what I'm supposed to be doing." I tell them, "As little as possible." The

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problem is your making them dopier. You're isolating them more, but if you keep telling them what you're doing and then they tell you, "Don't do that," then you come back and say, "I didn't do that and here was the result." Then they will say, "Well, I guess you'd better do that." Over time, you will educate them. Now, is that fun? Probably not, but I would argue that a month of doing that is probably worth it, if it gives you a year of working for a manager who actually understands the value of what you do.

Joe: Kind of like viewing teamwork from an individual's perspective of how I can create team performance versus "This is how my managers are supposed to create a team. This is how this is supposed to happen." It's really saying, as an individual; I want to create a better team, but that team is my team I'm on. The people that influence me and I'm going to create it better for them.

Ed: Exactly. If there is a unifying theme here, it is that. You are a node; you are a piece of a larger puzzle, of a larger web. In that web, there needs to be teamwork, and there needs to be effective meetings and there needs to be good information transfer and there needs to be a lack of drama and a preponderance of useful output. All of that needs to happen in that web and your job in that web is to do your part. This is a book about how to do your part and how to do your part in a way that is as stress free as possible and as reactive as possible. If you do your part, the rest of that starts to happen.

Joe: It really sounds like today's quality circle, but it's a world-wide circuit and it reminds me of the commercial where one person sees someone else help someone, and someone else helps someone and then someone else helps someone, because that's the type of outputs that we are looking for. It is self-directed teams.

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Ed: That a good analogy, Joe. That's what we are trying to do is start things that, you do it, and then I do it because I saw you do it and then it kind of goes forward. That's how we got where we are anyway. Everything we do now that we label as culture is just things that I saw someone else do and so I started to do them, and now we teach them to each other. This is about putting in a few new things at a time that will begin to influence those patterns.

Joe: The better that you do it, do you become a greater influencer and do you really feel in the long-term, that's how managers should be really decided upon rather than the old Peter Principle of someone being promoted till they're incapable of doing a job?

Ed: Yeah, that's not a great model. I would love to see a world in which managers are, and there are companies are very much like this, in which managers are promoted based upon their output. So you produce output at one level, so we say, "OK, you're able to produce output at that level, let's try you at the next level and see how you do". Yes, if you're practicing the right kind of pattern that tend to engender output around you, then absolutely, you will as a manager be able to produce more output.

There are managers out there that are intelligent and well-meaning and everything else, but they don't know what patterns to use, and they end up in a situation where they feel like they have to do everything themselves, for example. If you talk to them, there are life consequences. There are people divorcing and families being destroyed because of the stress at work. It's serious stuff, and it's because, in many cases, nothing other than the managers, just don't what patterns to use. These are some patterns they can use that will help.

Joe: Managers aren't necessarily promoted because of their ability to manage at or necessarily promoted because they can

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create a good team. The people that create a great team environment necessarily aren't the managers, are they, or they should be, maybe.

Ed: Well, somewhere, somebody has to do that, right. In some cases, the managers are great at it and some cases, what you find in reality is there is a manager who is very good at some part of the managerial job and then there's some other employee who serves as the team coordinator. That's fine. One of the things we know good leaders and managers do, is they delegate the pieces they're not great at. But what you have to have is, you have to have somewhere in the system of the group, somebody who works on making sure the team works as a functional unit. Unless you have a situation in which every employee works in a vacuum, then you have to have some kind of team output. If you do that incorrectly, it ends up affecting the overall output of the organization.

Joe: Is there a key point that maybe you'd like to get across about the book?

Ed: My main point with the book is; these are practices you can practice. Wherever you are, whatever level you are at, these are things you can do. If you are a manager or a leader, you may see a faster result, but whoever you are, you can begin to practice these behaviors and, in fact, even if you are a brand new employee, you can practice these behaviors as you come in the door, and they will help you to integrate into the company.

Joe: What do you have on the horizon, Ed? Do you have another book in you or are you promoting this book, do you have some seminars and some TV appearances coming up?

Ed: I just recently, in the last week or so, shot another set of white board videos, so we have four more videos coming out. One of them is about giving advice, one of them is about how to

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develop employees and there are a few others. That's one thing that we've just finished up with. I am waiting for those to release. Like I said, the "Train the Trainer" and the certifications on the class that goes with "Make Work Great" are just starting to garner some interest, so I see next year as probably being very much about delivering a new class and also getting some people around the country, both inside companies and freelance people certified, so they can use the patterns and use the tools and use the class, as well.

That's pretty much it. I don't know that I have a book in me for next year. I actually joked with my friends that if I even talked about writing a book for 2012, I want them to hit me. Because it is, it is a lot of work. I think I need a little short break, but I am so pleased with how this one came out. I think we're going to work on this one for a while.

Joe: I think you did a great job with it. Ed, I'd like to thank you. This podcast will be available from Business901 website and also on Business901 iTunes store.

Ed: OK, Joe. Thank you. Have a great day.



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