

# I M P A C T

Your Performance Improvement Resource from BEI

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## PERFORMANCE PERSPECTIVES

### Tipping the Scales in Your Company's Favor

Fashion trends. Crime waves. The rise of teenage smoking. The phenomena of word of mouth. What do all of these have in common? They are examples of occurrences that have contagious, far reaching qualities and that more often than not, were caused by one dramatic event, or the "tipping point". This is the point at which something mundane suddenly becomes widely accepted or a sudden event catapults or leverages change. In his bestseller, *The Tipping Point*, Malcolm Gladwell examines why major changes in our society frequently happen suddenly and unexpectedly, and then spread like outbreaks. Gladwell reveals that a single person or a small event can account for a social epidemic, and the moment when they take off, when they reach their critical mass, is the tipping point.

#### Key Elements Behind a Tipping Point

*The Tipping Point* introduces three key factors that account for why some ideas, messages, or products tip. These include the:

- *Law of the Few:* This factor refers to the nature of the messenger. According to Gladwell, social epidemics are driven by the efforts of a handful of exceptional people. To spread a new concept, you only have to affect a few people who are extremely well connected, eager to help others, and persuasive.
- *Stickiness Factor:* This factor refers to the content or delivery of the message. The message being delivered must be memorable so that it sticks in someone's mind, motivating him or her to stay tuned in or to act in some way.
- *Power of context:* This factor refers to environmental conditions or features. It is not necessary to solve big problems in order to bring about significant change. Change can be tipped by adjusting the smallest or most basic details of the immediate environment.

In attempting to make an idea, attitude, or behavior tip, what we are attempting to do is change our audience in some small yet significant way. As Gladwell reveals, we're trying to infect our audience, sweep them up in our epidemic. This is exactly what companies are trying to do with major change initiatives. Given this, can the concept of a tipping point be successfully applied to organizational change? We believe that it can.

#### SUGGESTIONS FOR RECOGNIZING "TIPPING POINTS"

- Build relationships
- Understand your company's business goals and strategies
- Ask questions; don't assume things
- Look for small opportunities for improvement
- Listen to the real message
- Consider environmental factors that could be altered

## Find the Tipping Point in Your Change Initiatives

Today's companies are constantly seeking new tools, techniques, and resources to produce high impact performance improvement, often resulting in a significant investment in time and money. What company would not be interested in a simple, cost effective way to turn a strategy into action, or to tip a change initiative and cause it to spread like an epidemic throughout the organization?

Following are some ideas for how companies can find tipping points to help start and manage change epidemics based on Gladwell's key factors.

1. Create an opportunity for individuals to get together on a regular basis to brainstorm ideas and opportunities to facilitate a change or improvement initiative. This "think tank" should be comprised of a cross section of individuals within the organization. Invite individuals that meet Gladwell's criteria of the Law of the Few. Charge this group with identifying innovative ways to introduce a change initiative and encourage employees to embrace the initiative. This process could lead to the discovery of the "tipping point" for the change.
2. When you look for ways to make your message about change stick with employees, consider the way that the message is being delivered. Parents often say to their children "It's not what you say but how you say it that counts". How are managers in your company delivering new information or processes to employees? Are they showing support for the change initiative through their tone of voice? Remember, it's the little, often overlooked, things that can lead to the tipping point.
3. Consider environmental factors when looking to bring about change. For example, if you are trying to improve safety within a plant setting, one thing that you could consider is improving the cleanliness or tidiness of the surroundings. While this sounds basic, it is key to role modeling and supporting safe practices. This basic, simple factor could be the tipping point that spreads a safety mindset among employees.

Remember that key to a tipping point is that sometimes big changes follow small events, and sometimes change can happen very quickly. In terms of organizational change, the outcome could far outweigh the intervention. Keep your eyes and mind open for tipping points as a cost effective way to spread change in your company.

## From Strategy to Action

By sharing client projects and BEI solutions, our goal is to offer you insight and information to increase your success at moving from strategy to action on your performance improvement projects. The elements of this section include a brief description of a client challenge, critical success factors or the expectations for the project, solutions for meeting the critical success factors, and the lessons learned, or what we would do differently if we did the project again.

### Challenge

Design and develop an Assessment Center for Branch Assistants (Tellers) and Member Service Representatives at a Michigan-based credit union.

### Critical Success Factors

- On-time--as committed to the employees, the first position was to be assessed six weeks from the launch of the project
- Skill and competency driven--assessments needed to tie to job descriptions, identified skills and core competencies
- Fair and credible--assessments needed to be robust, challenging, and consistently applied and scored
- Provide for development—assesseees needed to easily identify actions for improving performance through a development plan



## Solutions

- Behavioral descriptions were created for technical, customer service and leadership skills, and essential core competencies
- Assessments were created utilizing a variety of testing methods such as “in basket,” role play, group discussion, interview and checkpoints (written tests)
- An Assessor Guide was created to provide guidance during the various phases of the assessment (assessing, scoring, analyzing, providing results, developing a plan)
- Learning maps (a developmental aid that identifies actions employees can take to close gaps between current and expected performance) were developed to aid in the creation of individual development plans. Each learning map contained activities for or references to:
  - Self directed learning
  - Mentor facilitated learning
  - Training and development programs
  - Books
  - Videos
  - Web sites

## Lessons Learned

- Allow enough time between development and launch to pilot and test the assessment process thoroughly
- It is challenging for associates of the assessees to act as assessors; they need to be well prepared in order to maintain distance during the process
- It is critical to agree to expected behaviors and non-negotiable items up front to ensure the validity of the assessment center

## Marketplace

### Personal Listening Profile

*Matching listening approaches to communication needs*

Effective listening is crucial to productive communication. It is estimated that people screen out or change the intended purpose of what they hear in over 70% of all communications. Based on over 13 years of empirical research, the Personal Listening Profile is a highly reliable instrument to help individuals identify their most natural listening approaches and:

- Learn how attitudes impact listening effectiveness
- Recognize how others listen
- Develop new ways of listening to overcome communication barriers
- Enhance performance through new listening skills

BEI is an authorized distributor of the *Personal Listening Profile*. For more information about this performance improvement tool contact BEI at 248.625.8100 or visit:

<http://www.inscapepublishing.com/products/c217.asp?product=5>



## Worthy Web Sites

<http://www.classicalmusicdetroit.com/> *24-hour Motor City classical music returns.* After the demise of WQRS-FM, Detroit became the nation's largest market region devoid of full-time classical music programming. This new Internet radio station brings back not only our favorite symphonic selections, but also WQRS notable veteran radio hosts. While the music remains classical, the new venue is leading edge. Listen to this Internet music station on personal computers, Internet radios, and web-enabled telephones and, as anticipated by next year, automobiles. In addition, the web site serves as a conduit for local arts and entertainment events, and offers a composer of the month feature, ticket exchanges and discussions. Arrivederci Beastie Boys.

<http://www.tsn.com/> *The ultimate trade show resource.* Multiple search options make it easier to find trade show and exhibition industry information. Search by industry (over 130 dropdown choices), show name, month, or location. However, it is necessary to register to view extended details about the shows. One can also find and enroll online for seminars, classes, workshops, corporate training events and conferences listed annually. A handy new feature is the ability to receive e-mail alerts for shows in your industry of interest.

<http://knowledge.wharton.upenn.edu/> *A business knowledge source.* Brought to you from the Wharton School at the University of Pennsylvania, [knowledge@Wharton](mailto:knowledge@Wharton) is a bi-weekly online resource that offers the latest business insights, information and research from a variety of sources. Information is structured at four levels ranging from brief summaries to academic papers. Use the "quick search" or click on one of the 14 sub-categories (including Executive Education, Leadership & Change, Finance & Investment and Business Ethics), to receive topic-specific articles and multiple web links.

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