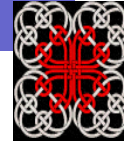


Human Factors

Integrating Business Objectives and People Strategies

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*Crosby &
Associates*

Survey Feedback - A Powerful and Practical Tool For Change

A colleague in the Nuclear Industry wrote recently seeking advice on how to promote "Human Performance Awareness" in a group of power plants. While much has been written within the Nuclear Industry on how to define "Human Performance"

(for example INPO, the Institute for Nuclear Power Operators, has some excellent materials for how to think systematically when doing root cause analysis of

human performance related events), how to implement the desired behaviors remains elusive. This issue of Human Factors focuses on a powerful yet misunderstood tool for creating the open culture necessary for discussing and improving performance: surveys and survey feedback.

A survey of 600 companies conducted by Crosby & Associates Founder Robert Crosby in the early 1980s "indicated that 30% of boss-employee work relationships were so sour that they needed to be addressed if meaningful, effective work was to follow" (Robert Crosby, [The Authentic Leader](#), 1998). Without the ability

of management at all levels to hear employee concerns (even if those concerns are conveyed in a less than professional manner) without becoming defensive and combative, no error prevention program (or nuclear safety culture) can fully succeed. Survey feedback, when

"We know what does not work. It does not work to survey people and not show them the results. It also does not work to survey people and have top management or an outside expert develop recommendations (prescriptions). It does not work to survey people and have a general session and report the results to all concerned and do nothing else. These approaches all have been tried hundreds of times and, with rare exception, been found wanting. People become irritable and defensive, with a resulting lowered morale and decreased work efficiency."

Robert Crosby, [Walking the Empowerment Tightrope](#)

properly managed, is one of the fastest routes to reinforcing the desired behaviors at an organizational scale.

The nuts and bolts of survey feedback are as follows:

1. Let the people who filled out the survey interpret their own data. This may seem radical, but it's actually a return to the methods of Rensis Likert, Ron Lippitt, and other pioneers of survey work. They knew that no one, no matter their expertise, can provide as accurate an interpretation of their own data as the people who were surveyed. Equally important, by identifying problems (and strengths!) via data, survey feedback helps break the ice on discussing difficult issues.

2. Use the process to address and strengthen supervisor and employee relations at all levels. Effective hierarchical relationships (boss and employees) are critical to achieving production, quality, and safety goals. Problem solving,

whether focused on the hierarchical relationship itself, or on tasks, *must include face to face dialogue.* Attempts to deal with these relationships

while simultaneously avoiding them (such as with anonymous feedback) are more likely to hurt strained relations than to help.

3. Start at the top and "cascade." Survey feedback, like many activities, is easiest to lead if the leadership starts with themselves, and then moves the activity

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INSIDE THIS ISSUE:

Survey Feedback 1

Editor's Corner 1

Food For Thought 2

downwards into the organization. This lends credibility to the process, and allows each layer to participate before facing the potentially difficult task of survey feedback dialogue with their ...

(Continued on page 2)

We're on the web!

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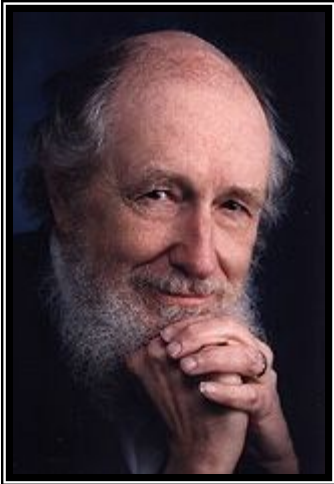
Editor's Corner

Welcome to the third year of *Human Factors* and to this year's Fall edition.

We're keeping this Editor's Corner brief, as the main article on survey feedback deserves all the

space we can give it. Most of our consultants cut their teeth on this practical methodology, and we strongly encourage you to apply it.

Gil Crosby, Editor



Crosby & Associates Founder Robert P Crosby

Survey Feedback... (continued from page one)

own direct reports.

3. Provide skilled facilitation. You can't expect teams with strained boss-employee work relationships to improve those relationships without skilled help. In a nutshell, these teams need to move from generalizations based (often loosely) on past behavior ("you can't trust him!") to reciprocal agreements (i.e., the boss and the employees take responsibility and/or commit to doing things differently) about future behavior. Even groups with strong work relations benefit from

periodic facilitation (all groups and organizations have blind spots). A cadre of the organization's own people can be trained to provide some, and eventually most, of this service.

4. Survey both task and relationship factors. As long as you cover both, and follow a feedback process similar to that outlined here, what survey you use becomes a less important variable. Crosby & Associates works with surveys ranging from 160 computer tabulated questions to a survey of 10 questions written on a flipchart. While choosing the right tool is important, it's the process that yields the results.

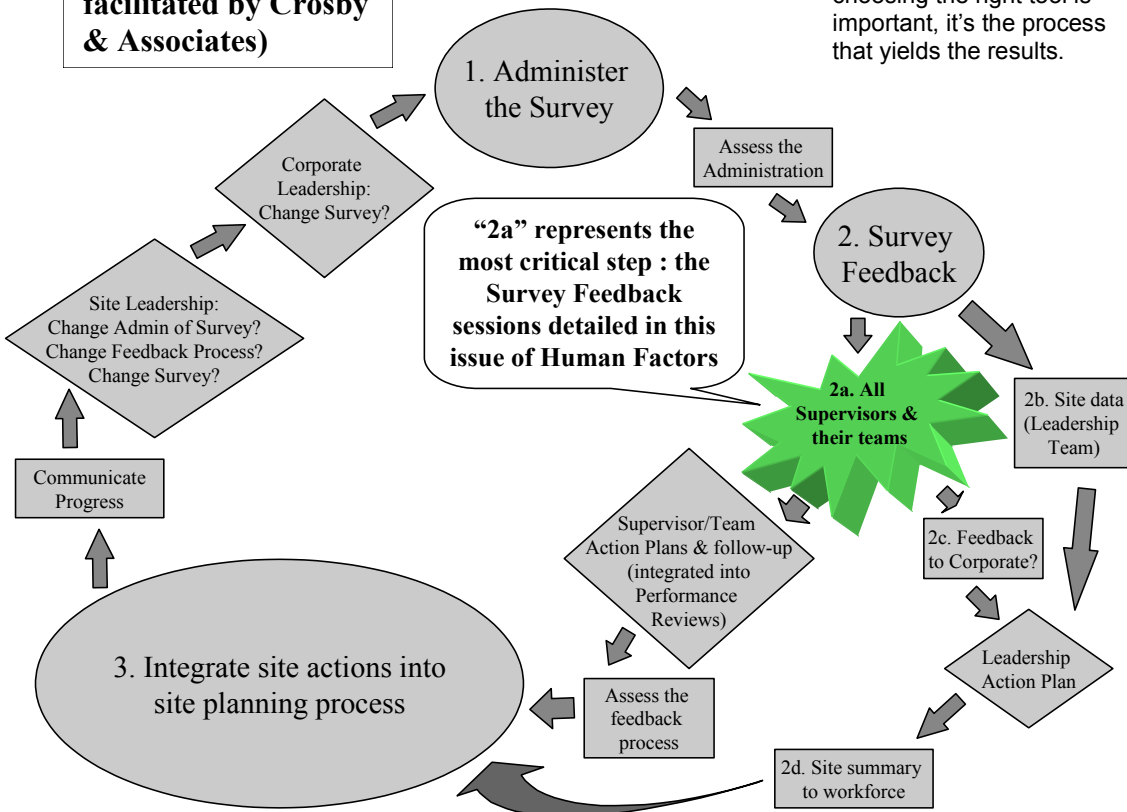
5. Facilitate Specific Action. The focus of the sessions, especially when there's strained relations, has to be on future actions/commitments, not on debating the past.

6. Structure Follow-Through. All groups should meet in some manner (staff meetings, tool box sessions, etc.) to assess progress, discuss and clear up new misunderstandings, develop new actions, and so on. Many groups will need skilled facilitation during follow-through.

With an annual survey, the process of administration and continuous improvement becomes important (see graph, page 2). Unfortunately, this is where most organizations put all their focus. The process with the most potential, *survey feedback where supervisors and their crews work with their own data*, is rare.

In sum, while the quality of facilitation is a key variable, the use of data to promote and focus dialogue is a basic strategy that can be applied in many ways. As always, Crosby & Associates stands ready to assist as you use this and other methods to improve your organization and achieve your goals.

Graph of Annual Survey Process (as facilitated by Crosby & Associates)



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FOOD FOR THOUGHT

“They who put their pencil to the survey paper should also see and work the data.”

Dr. Ronald Lippitt* (from a private conversation with John Scherer and CKM President Robert Crosby)

“There is no more effective way than survey feedback (turning data into action) to involve people quickly at the key points of data gathering, problem solving, solution recommending, action, and follow-through.”

Robert Crosby (Walking the Empowerment Tightrope, 1992,)

*One of the early pioneers of Organizational Development - Editor