



The Importance of the WIIFM to Workforce Management (WFM)

All of us who manage people or who have responsibility for communicating information to large employee groups struggle with the issue of how to present “bad news” or even “good news.” Surely you have had the experience of providing information that you thought would be received well only to find the reverse was true? That is because the sharing of the rationale behind our business decisions and actions is perceived very differently based on an individual’s role within the organization.

Enter the WIIFM. WIIFM stands for “What’s in it for me?” The WIIFM may be one of the best tools in your communication’s arsenal. While it may be an accident that the acronym contains the elements of your group’s name, WFM, it may also be prophetic.

As you struggle with how to bridge the gap between operations and the WFM team, remember that because you play a different role in the organization, that you will have different views on the information that you receive or communicate.

To reduce tension and organizational conflict, try to remember the WIIFM each time you communicate a decision or a rationale for a business action. Ask yourself, if you were the person receiving the information”

- What’s in it for me?
- How would this new information make my life or my job better or easier?
- Why should I be supportive of this decision?

When you can identify the answers to these questions and use them as a critical element in your communication plan, then you will have strengthened organizational alignment while reducing organizational conflict.

Now, that is not to say that every message will be welcomed and there will be an end to all contention and strife. That would be unrealistic. What will happen is that people will eventually begin to understand that good business decisions support their individual objectives long-term even though those same decisions may sometimes make the present situation difficult or inconvenient.

Let me provide an example. Let’s say that a major software release has occurred and that an undetected bug has dramatically increased calls to the technical support center. Service levels are virtually 0% and call volumes are 25% above forecast with AHT also higher than forecast due to the complexity and lack of documentation surrounding the

software issue. Multiple options are available for addressing this service crisis (e.g., online support updates, IVR additions, increased staffing through a variety of channels including overtime, etc.).

A decision has been made: **mandatory overtime**. Now mandatory overtime is one of the most onerous and difficult issues to communicate to a front-line workforce. It is disruptive to their personal schedules and asks them to contribute more hours, albeit at higher pay, in a period of high stress. It is a decision of last resort. However, for the purposes of illustration, we will assume that all other tactics such as cancellation/delay of off-phone activity, extended hours for part-timers, voluntary over-time, and voluntary movement of scheduled time-off have been exhausted. We have exhausted our bag of tricks and must move to this last resort.

If we explain the decision simply in terms of improving service levels or in terms of meeting operational standards, we will probably encounter resentment and frustration from the workforce. However, if we address the WIIFM in the overtime decision, we will reduce the negative aspects of the action. When evaluating the WIIFM, we would review the questions detailed earlier with the following as potential results:

- This is a necessary step to retain valuable customers who are our lifeblood; without them we do not have jobs (Job security is a definite WIIFM)
- This is an important move to keep us on track for our fiscal year revenue goals and profit sharing thresholds (Profit sharing is a definite WIIFM)
- A reduction in the level of customer hostility/anxiety as we answer the calls more quickly (Lengthy delays in answering calls lead to higher levels of customer hostility which is stressful. Reduction of caller hostility through faster answer time is a definite WIIFM—less stress for all personnel handling customers)

The glitches in installing and operating the software may still be inconvenient, customers may still resent them, but customers will be more understanding if we respond to those needs quickly. Customers who are calling for other reasons, will not be frustrated at what they perceive to be our general inability to service them if answer times improve. The personnel on duty who have been advised to stay an additional 1-4 hours per day for the next few days may be inconvenienced, but at least they understand the link between the business decision (overtime) and their own self-interest (job security, profit sharing, and reduced customer hostility/irate calls).

Remember the business rationale is not enough; we need to understand and communicate why the business decision benefits us all. We need to explain the WIIFM.