



The New Theory of Relativity

Relationships = Productivity

BY NOAH BLUMENTHAL

Einstein's theory of relativity, $E=mc^2$, revolutionized the field of physics despite its remarkable simplicity. **The new theory of relativity is equally simple: R=P. Relationships equal productivity.**

It may be a stretch to think that this simple equation will revolutionize the field of leadership, but there are no better or stronger motivational forces than strong relationships. People work for a living, but they work hard for other people. They stay in their jobs because they like their boss and coworkers. They deal honestly with colleagues because they value the relationships that would suffer otherwise. Relationships are the key to the most productive work environments, and yet it seems that the gap between those in power and those without power is widening at an ever increasing rate. Leaders at the top of organizations and workers at the bottom are out of touch with one another, and there is a reason for this: Ineptivity.

Ineptivity.

Dictionary.com defines inept as, "displaying a lack of judgment, sense, or reason," and activity as, "the state of being active; energetic action or movement; liveliness." When you combine the two, you get ineptivity; action without reason, energetic lack of judgment, senseless movement. The symbol of ineptivity is the hamster's exercise wheel. The hamster runs non-stop at top speed, frequently catching other hamsters in the flurry of motion it has created, yet it never gets anywhere. Ineptivity is the result of the widely held corporate philosophy that motion is the highest principle and that activity denotes productivity and success. It is a belief that the creation of work and the preponderance of activity, often by the "leaders" and managers of an organization, are what cause a company to thrive.

This principle put into practice results in high levels of activity and low levels of morale, large quantities of action and minimal quantities of thought, high verbal acceptance and low (or no) commitment. Unfortunately, ineptivity is wide spread. Most of us live and work in ineptive organizations, and when

we don't act to change these patterns, we become partially responsible for them. This is the current state of our corporate lives. We hold as our highest principle that we must be productive, efficient and effective, that we must act, must constantly be in motion. We hold these principles based on the justification that there is too much work and too little time. We don't have time to make better decisions or build a better workplace, better relationships, and better world. What gets left behind in this effort? What do we sacrifice? We leave behind our co-workers, our families, our direct reports, our managers, and ourselves. We leave behind the opportunity to identify and achieve goals that inspire us.

Why Now?

In 1970 Abby Hoffman wrote *Steal This Book* for a generation of people who felt completely disenfranchised. From "authority", this generation perceived more anger than kindness, more skepticism than trust, more lies than honesty, and more self-interest than altruism. All of these perceptions they returned in their views and actions toward authority. *Steal This Book* was a beacon to a frustrated group of people, telling them to take back their power in a manner that would aggravate and infuriate the establishment. It was a message telling people to live their lives as they saw fit, not according to someone else's rules.

Ineptivity is our modern day, corporate version of leading people to be disenfranchised. We are, in many organizations, setting the same stage that existed in 1970. Members of organizations perceive their corporate leaders as untrustworthy and selfish. While ineptivity is not as divisive as the Vietnam War and the civil rights movement, it is serving the similar function of disenfranchising a large segment of the workforce. The stock market drop in the early 2000s caused management to increase controls, place limits on innovation and free decision-making, and constrict the individuals who were hired for their originality. At a time when economic conditions demanded that organizations make better use of the limitless capacities of their employees to become more competitive, managers at all levels were seeking safety instead. Acting out of a fear to take risks, managers were responding to greater and greater challenges with weaker and weaker responses. Whenever money gets tight, stay in line; don't rock the boat; do as we are told are the mantras of the day and above all, look busy.

This would have been challenging enough for the modern workforce, but it was not to be the only factor to exacerbate the ineptivity of corporate America. September 11 caused people all across the world to question the meaning in their lives, and seek truth and value in greater quantities on deeper levels. Then Enron, Tyco and other corporate scandals reduced the already diminishing levels of trust and respect that employees had for their corporate leaders. People became less trusting and less tolerant of management. They became less eager to help fulfill some corporate objective that may or may not be honest and benevolent and may, in fact, be detrimental to them.

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All of these events taken together have created a void that leaves people frustrated, angry, exhausted, unfulfilled, indifferent and appalled with their leaders, their organizations, and themselves. It is imperative that we take action to reverse this trend before *Steal This Company* becomes the next best-seller, before the book in every employee's hand details how to live free off of your company without really contributing to its growth. The people who made Abby Hoffman's book a best-"seller" did so because they felt that their leaders gave them and their views no respect. The leaders of today must make it impossible for anyone in their organizations to hold such views, to believe that they are not valued, or feel that they are not an integral part of a strong community. Leaders of today must help people shed the self-image of a hamster in an exercise wheel.

There is still hope . . .

The New Theory of Relativity

Ineptivity holds action on high in the name of production and effectiveness. The new theory of relativity abides by the principle that relationships drive productivity. Valuing people (who should never be referred to as human capital) stimulates productivity, and thought and reflection lead to efficiency and effectiveness. Attending to people's needs is an end result. Time taken away from the day to day activity of corporate life and dedicated to building trust, raising awareness, and understanding others is equally or more important to the bottom line.

The new theory of relativity is like the original. It is simple in concept, but difficult to grasp in reality. There are five actions, however, that can take an organization there if they are followed with dedication and consistency. These steps can be followed by anyone, at any level of the organization, and in any function or position.

The first step in relativity is defining new goals for yourself and those around you.

When you help yourself and others discover and articulate your and their goals and dreams, you lay the foundation for better understanding and better relationships. Only when these goals are understood can you help make the connections and find the common paths to meet all of your objectives. In this context organizations become energized, motivating, fun, and exciting places to work. You can trade in command, control and 50% effort from employees for empowerment, uncertainty and 100% effort. The risk is that people define new opportunities and move the organization in new directions than those previously identified by the leaders. The reward is that the organization achieves these new objectives and finds them to be even more exciting than the original objectives. Allow people to define their goals and discuss their aspirations, and they will find ways to live up to the requirements of their visions.

People fear asking others about their dreams because they are afraid that their organization can't fulfill those dreams. This is the ostrich sticking its head in the sand approach. When you start

the dialogue, you may be surprised to find out that you can help fulfill many of the dreams around you. On the other hand, there may be some that you can't fulfill. So what? If someone's goals are incompatible with the goals of the organization, then the best thing that can possibly be done is to help that person realize that truth and help them discover new paths that will lead to their goals. If that person stays with the company, they have the opportunity to find new goals that can be fulfilled. If they leave the organization, they will do so telling people how enlightened and wonderful the company is. The alternative is that they stay with the company and tell everyone how miserable and closed-minded it is.

The next step is to find ways to support others' goals. Ask everyone--direct reports, peers, managers--how you can help them achieve their goals. When you come to someone with an offering that is valuable to them, you build trust and encourage them to support you in return. What could be more valuable to someone than help in achieving their own goals? What could build more commitment and loyalty than offering your time and energy to help colleagues on what is important to them? This step is where trust really begins to build. As this trust builds, you will experience reciprocity and support for your own efforts and goals.

The third step is to ask others how you affect them. Ask how you are doing as a manager, as a co-worker, as a direct report. What do you do that helps people? What do you do that makes others' work life more difficult? The answers to these questions are important and must be acted upon to build trust. Show commitment to change yourself in order to improve the working conditions of those around you. As you change, others will try to follow you and improve how they work with you and their other colleagues.

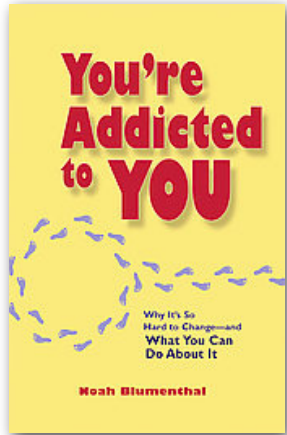
Fourth, ask what could be done better. What does the organization do well? What could the organization improve? What does it do that makes you want to work here? What does it do that makes you unhappy? Utopia is a perfect place, an ideal, something for which to strive which can never be attained. It is our job however, to strive. We must hold ourselves responsible for rejecting the status

quo and continually seeking to improve our organization. Again, this is a question that should be asked of everyone--direct reports, peers, and managers. Here you have the opportunity to change not just yourself, but situations all around you. You become the catalyst, the champion of improving your organization.

Finally, be patient and persistent. This process may take some time. You may not get honest responses to all of these questions the first time you ask. People may not be ready to trust you if they have used ineptly. That's normal. Don't hold it against them. They simply need some time to acclimate to the idea of an organization based on relativity. So it takes commitment.

Welcome to the new relativity. It is simple in concept but difficult to grasp in reality. It takes time and patience, but the payoffs are commitment to valuable goals, relationships built on trust, and motivation to improve. Be active and repeat these steps, and then repeat them and repeat them and repeat them. Become blind to title and position, and distribute your efforts evenly to all those who surround you. Eventually, not only will you receive honesty and trust for your efforts, but your actions will spread.

When everyone practices the new relativity, you don't just have a company, you have a community, and when you have built a community, productivity will never be a challenge. The time for the inept organization to change is at hand. We have the methods to implement the new theory of relativity into our culture. It is in each of our hands to bring this community to life. 📌



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