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Bringing Work to Life

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## Welcome

Welcome to the latest issue of Bringing Work to Life. In the last two issues we explored:

- Bringing meaning to our work lives, the benefits to each of us and to our organizations, in “May You Live All the Days of Your Life” ([http://www.elsdon.com/august\\_2004.htm](http://www.elsdon.com/august_2004.htm))

and

- Seven key aspects of the organizational and business drivers for workforce development in “Opening the Door for Workforce Development” ([http://www.elsdon.com/july\\_2004.htm](http://www.elsdon.com/july_2004.htm)).

This month we explore one aspect of personal leadership growth in “Facing Our Greatest Fears.”

## Facing Our Greatest Fears: Public Speaking

Picture a seven year old standing in front of his new school assembly. Alone, mortified and deeply ashamed. Muffled titters in the background. An angry headmistress striding forward to eject him from the auditorium. The headmistresses’ eyes are bulging, her face is red with rage. What mortal sin had the boy committed that day? Perhaps he fought with another child, or did he destroy some piece of valuable school property? No, much worse. He had been commanded to read in front of the assembled school. Overcome by fear of public speaking and unable to do this, he instead proceeded to wet his trousers and could not read the passage. He was hauled out and made to clean up while a loud argument ensued between the headmistress and the boy’s classroom teacher.

That boy was me. For the next 20 years of my life I was terrified of speaking in public. It turned out that it didn’t matter much in the academic research world I entered initially. However, it mattered a great deal in the corporate world. And so it came to pass that I found myself in a class with 25 other engineers, most of whom to

supporting organizations enhance effectiveness through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices. Prior to establishing his practice, Ron held senior leadership positions at diverse organizations.

Ron is also author of *Affiliation in the Workplace: Value Creation in the New Organization* (2003), a book describing leadership approaches to integrate the needs of the individual with the needs of the organization for the benefit of both. Ron holds a Ph.D. from Cambridge University in Chemical Engineering, an M.A. from John F. Kennedy University in Career Development and a first class honors degree from Leeds University in Chemical Engineering. With his co-author he was awarded the Walker Prize by the Human Resource Planning Society for the paper that best advances state-of-the-art thinking or practices in human resources.

my surprise, shared this speaking phobia. Together we took faltering steps to confront our fear of public speaking. Surprisingly, to each of us, under the supportive tutelage of Dr. Jeremiah Goldstein, we succeeded in facing down our fear. Further faltering steps continued over the years for me, leading to a gradual transformation. A transformation not only in capability, but also in my recognition of public speaking as a learned skill, just as legitimate as any technical skill. Today, while not Socrates reincarnated, I derive much pleasure from speaking with small and large groups. I receive many requests to present to groups both in person and in a virtual setting and sometimes to coach others on communication and presentation skills.

The memory of this childhood incident surfaced recently when several clients at senior levels in organizations talked with me about their fears of speaking in public. They were concerned that public speaking was an expected capability for them, while recognizing that many of their peers in the corporate world struggled with this skill. As we talked I was struck by the courage of these clients in confronting their fear and saddened by how much personal anxiety this created.

What does it take to speak effectively in public? Here are some core components:

- Know and communicate your context and purpose
  - Are you trying to inform, entertain or persuade. Be sure to communicate this in advance. Your audience will approach the session with quite different expectations in each case. An audience seeking information will expect you to bring significant knowledge and expertise. An audience seeking entertainment will expect a humorous and engaging style. Here the manner of presentation is as important as the content depth. Finally persuasive presentations present an audience with the consequences of different courses of action.
- Know your audience and build a relationship
  - Your audience has come to experience you, to understand how your life and knowledge can enhance theirs. You can give the gift of yourself most effectively if you know the audience, their expectations, their demographics, their shared perspectives and differences. Spend time learning about your audience in advance, and if you have an opportunity, mingle and meet with your audience before and after your engagement. This helps build a relationship of trust and believability.
- Know your content and learn from your audience
  - Prepare and prepare and prepare so that your content knowledge is second nature. It has been said that it takes 10 minutes to prepare a four hour presentation and four hours to prepare a ten-minute presentation. So prepare well. You can then focus on your engagement, on the road ahead rather than how to change gears. Be willing to listen to your audience and learn from them. I have many priceless vignettes that were kindly given by audience members. I was able to integrate these into later talks for the benefit of future audiences.
- Know yourself and strive for alignment of voice and touch

- Studies show that in assessing communications that we believe have mixed messages we assign about 55% weight to body language, about 38% weight to tone of voice and the remaining 7% to words. This is one reason we don't simply rely on written material. This means that we must embrace our content, in Max DePree's words (from his book *Leadership Jazz*) we must align our voice and touch. Doing so requires that we know and are comfortable with our natural style, whether it is more reflective or expressive. There are excellent assessments available that can help clarify our natural personality, listening and learning preferences.
- Know how to sustain interest
  - Blend facts and stories so that you can reach both those members of the audience who are highly analytical and those who respond well to an emotional appeal. In examining different approaches to delivering extensive survey information, I have found that, while the analytical and the anecdotal approaches can be individually effective, a combination of the two is a much more powerful call to action.
- Be flexible
  - I remember hearing the actor Michael Caine interviewed and reflecting on his early learning. As the curtain rose for one performance he found himself on stage and unexpectedly there was a chair in the middle of the stage. It was not supposed to be there. This threw Michael Caine off balance, and after the performance he asked one of his early mentors what to do in such a situation. Expecting to be told some artful approach to removing the offending object, instead he was told to bring it into his performance. To make it part of his work, to be flexible. Indeed I have found myself in situations where the projector didn't work, in an L-shaped room where only half the group could see me at any time, making a projection screen out of a tablecloth on the wall and so on. Ironically, these extemporaneous sessions were some of the best received. They speak to the importance of being flexible.
- Be passionate.
  - As an engineer I spent many hours in mathematics classes, most of which were about as interesting as reading the telephone directory, crammed with facts, short on inspiration. One class however was different. The instructor was passionate about his subject and carried that interest into the classroom. He inspired me to delve deeply into one aspect of mathematics and eventually explore new horizons and approaches. Speak with passion about those things you believe in and your audience will be set on fire.

My colleague Cynthia Bassham, pointed out that we can incorporate learning from the world of acting as we think about public speaking. Patsy Rodenburg in her book *Speaking Shakespeare* describes three circles of concentration and focus. The first circle is inner focused containing language in and for ourselves. The third circle is one of talking to the world in a general sweep – it can be aggressive and over hearty. The second circle is one of connecting, listening and speaking to individuals. In the second circle we speak to connect. It is here that we build relationship and mutual learning with our audience.

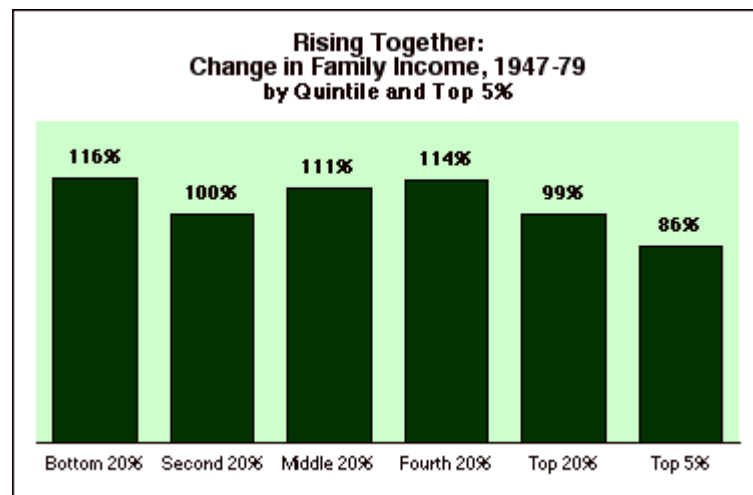
Recognize that there are elements of a speaking engagement that are outside your control. I remember once being present at the end of a daylong seminar for about 400 people given by a world-renowned expert on communication. I happened to overhear his comments to a colleague. “Today’s audience was lively and engaged, while yesterday’s was listless and disinterested.” The same content, the same location and a completely different response. So accept that this can happen even with the most accomplished and prepared speakers. Give of yourself and enjoy the experience. When you follow the principles we have explored here you are giving a special gift of yourself and your knowledge. Your audience will respond enthusiastically and value your gift to them.

*Please contact Ron Elsdon if you would like to know how Elsdon Organizational Renewal can help you build effective presentation skills.*

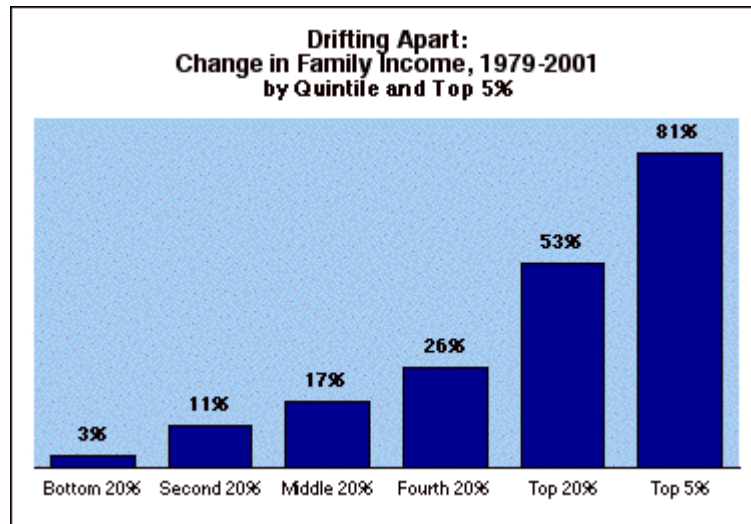
## Earning and Wealth Trends

The plight of those marginalized in our society, existing on minimum wage jobs, was highlighted by Barbara Ehrenreich in her book *Nickel and Dimed* (this link contains a video of Ms. Ehrenreich reviewing her experience living and creating her book: <http://www.inequality.org/conferencematerials.html>). David Shipler, working more as a social scientist, recently addressed a similar subject in his book *The Working Poor*.

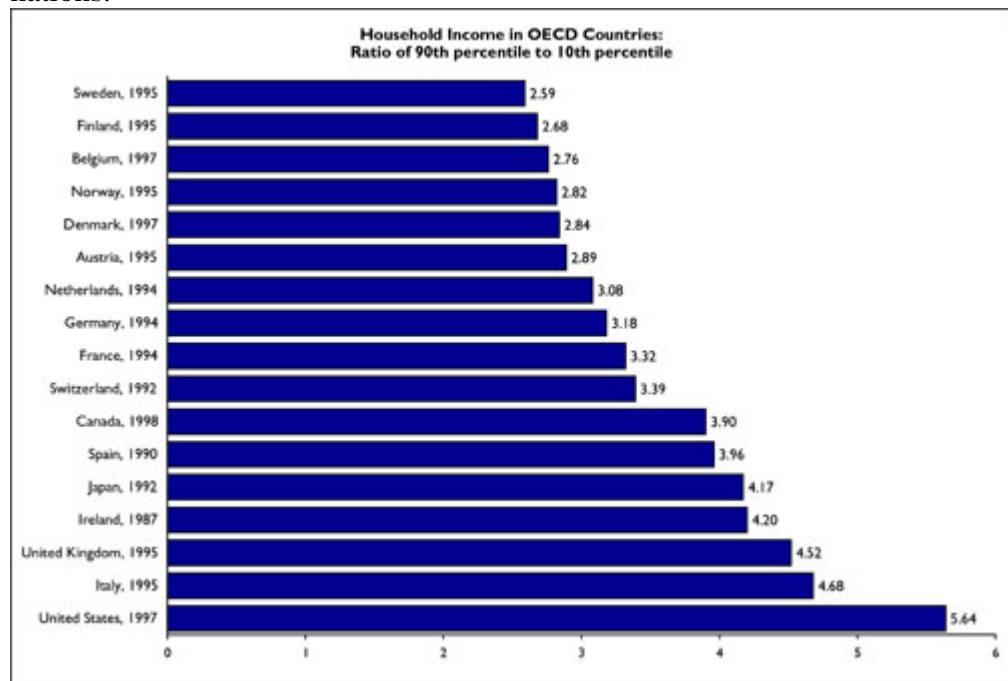
The challenge that these searing accounts of poverty in the U.S. today present to all of us is reinforced when we look at income and wealth trends. (Unless otherwise indicated the information shown in the following figures is from [www.inequality.org](http://www.inequality.org)). The poorest people in the U.S. gained economically in the period from the end of the second world war to the end of the 1970s as shown in the following figure.



However, a fundamental shift occurred beginning in the early 1980s with a massive redistribution of income from the poorest to the wealthiest:



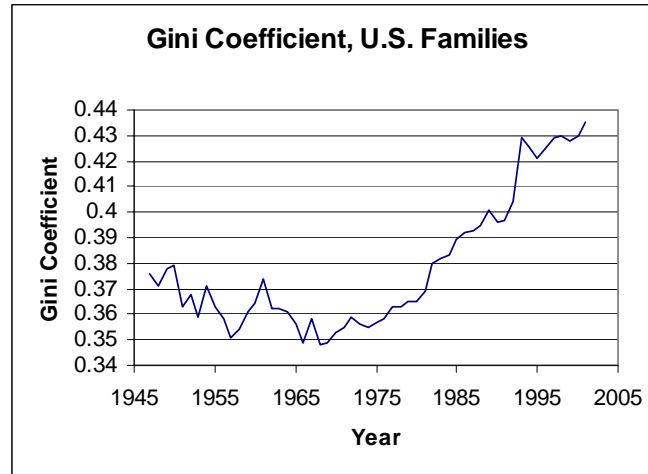
We might ask how does the situation in the U.S. compare with other developed countries? As we can see from the following chart, which compares the income of the wealthiest 10% (90<sup>th</sup> percentile) with the income for the poorest 10% (10<sup>th</sup> percentile), income inequality is much greater in the U.S. than in other developed nations.



But perhaps our overall Gross National Income (GNI) per capita dwarfs these other nations? In fact that is not the case. The GNI per capita for Norway and Switzerland exceeds that of the U.S. and it is close to that of the U.S. for other countries such as Sweden, Denmark and Japan. If we were to consider GNI on a risk return basis for individuals, as we might examine stocks, then the risks of incurring significant financial distress are much higher in the U.S. with fewer safety nets to address catastrophic events. On a risk/return basis compensation can look significantly less attractive in the U.S.

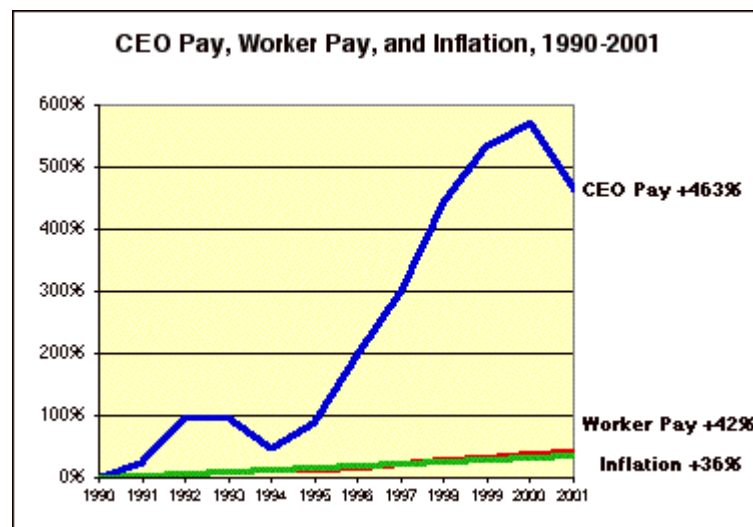
Another measure of income inequality is known as the Gini coefficient, which varies from a value 0 for complete equality (income is evenly distributed), to a value of 1

for complete inequality (one family owns the entire country's wealth). The following chart again shows the trend of gradually increasing equality in family income in the U.S from the late 1940s through the late 1970s. This changes abruptly in the early 1980s. Since then we have seen a dramatic increase in income inequality. Indeed the Gini coefficient in the U.S. today is more closely aligned with third world countries than with developed nations.



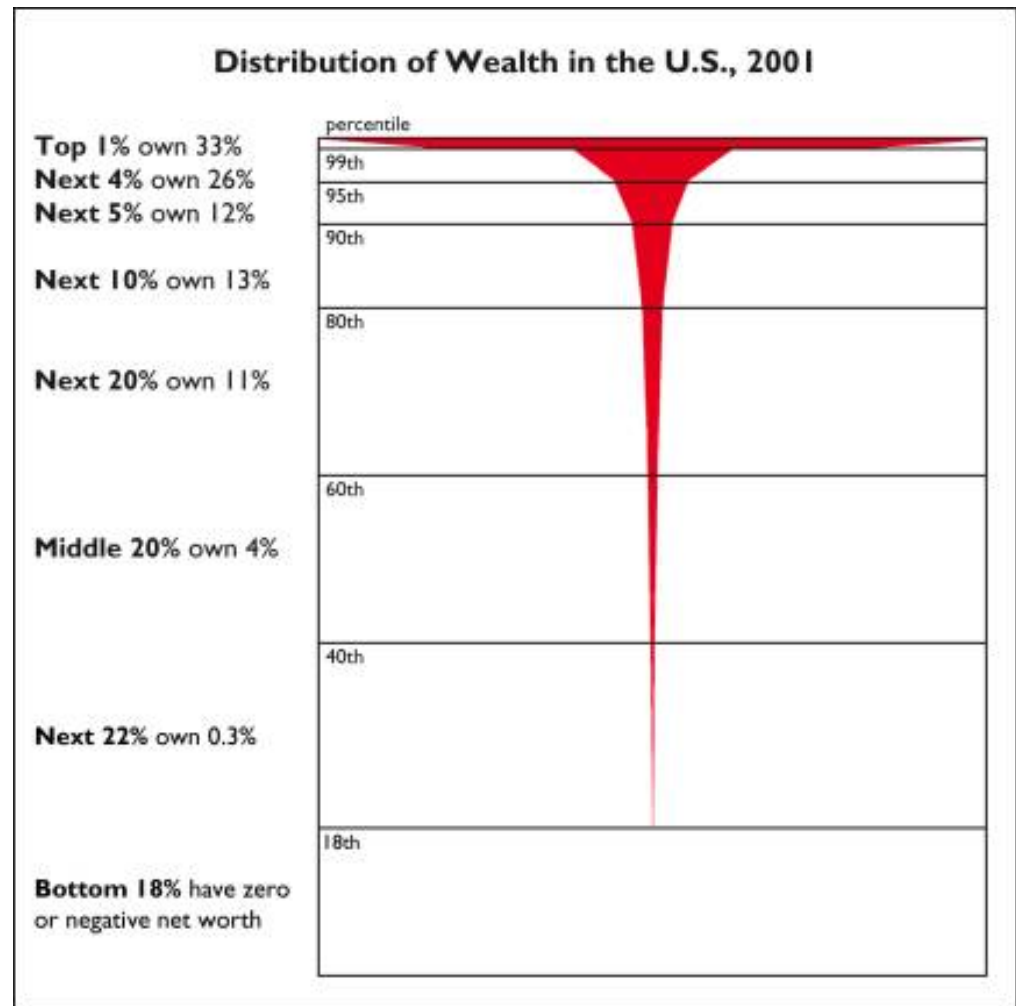
Source: U.S. Census Bureau

A number of factors contribute to this trend, taxation policy for example being one. Another is the choice within organizations about the distribution of their resources to their workforce. The following chart shows a gross disparity in the increase in CEO compensation relative to worker pay and inflation since 1990. Contrast this with the few examples of courageous leadership, such as Whole Foods, where the compensation of corporate officers is limited to 14 times the average annual compensation of full time employees. Not surprisingly Whole Foods financial performance in terms of revenue and profit growth exceeds that of much larger organizations in the same sector focused only on enriching their founders or executives.



And what have these income trends meant for wealth distribution? The following chart shows the wealthiest 5% in the U.S. owning almost 60% of the nation's wealth

and the poorest 18% having zero or negative net worth.



In the words of Franklin Delano Roosevelt “The test of our progress is not whether we add more to the abundance of those who have much; it is whether we provide enough for those who have too little.” Unfortunately today we are failing this test of progress. We are challenged to advocate for those who have little, and through courageous and inspiring personal leadership redress those gross inequities that shackle individuals, organizations, communities and society.

**If you would like to participate in a study of the influence of compensation distribution on organizational performance please contact Ron Elsdon ([renewal@elsdon.com](mailto:renewal@elsdon.com)).**

## Quote

Some questions to ask of ourselves as leaders, from Max DePree, Leadership Jazz

- When was the last time I called to say thank you?
- How often do I say “I don’t know”?
- Have we stopped hiring people better than we are?

- Do I realize that special insight often comes out of silence?
- Am I willing to let others see how I wish to be measured?
- Am I inflicting pain or bearing pain?
- Are the people who work for you your people or are you theirs?

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## Upcoming Elsdon Organizational Renewal (EOR) Events

- Staying Career Fit. Annual Career Workshop, French-American Chamber of Commerce of San Francisco.  
(Bubble Lounge Networking, <http://www.facssf.com/bubblelounge0804.html>)
  - September 16, 2004, Bubble Lounge, San Francisco, CA
- Building Affiliation: Workforce Leadership in Action. HR Southwest Concurrent Session.  
(HR Southwest, <http://www.hrsouthwest.com>)
  - October 7, 2004, Fort Worth Convention Center, TX
- Becoming Career Fit in Turbulent Times. Project Management Institute - SF Bay Area Chapter Meeting Presentation  
(Project Management Institute SFBAC - San Francisco Bay Area Chapter, [http://www.pmi-sfbac.org/index.phtml?menu=other\\_page&menu2=51](http://www.pmi-sfbac.org/index.phtml?menu=other_page&menu2=51))
  - October 21, 2004, Courtyard Marriott, San Francisco, CA
- Global Issues Forum. International Career Development Conference (ICDC) Panel Discussion  
(International Career Development Conference - Career Assistance. <http://www.careerccc.com>)
  - October 27, 2004, Sacramento Convention Center, CA
- Opening the Organizational Door for Career Development. International Career Development Conference (ICDC) Concurrent Session  
(International Career Development Conference - Career Assistance. <http://www.careerccc.com>)
  - October 29, 2004, Sacramento Convention Center, CA
- Building Employee Commitment in a Growing Economy. 56th Annual California Groundwater Association Convention and Trade Show Concurrent Session  
(California Groundwater Association Events, <http://www.groundh2o.org/events/events.html>)
  - November 6, 2004, Silver Legacy Resort and Casino, Reno, NV

We enhance your workforce, leadership and organization by:

- Using proprietary approaches to understand workforce and leadership challenges
- Creating tailored action plans and solutions to strengthen workforce and leadership practices
- Building individual capabilities and contributions

We enable you to focus on external results and building value, confident that your organization and leadership are operating at peak effectiveness.

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## Our Mission

To support your organization by enhancing **performance, productivity and effectiveness** through revitalized workforce relationships and leadership practices.

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## Our Approach and Values

We tailor our engagements to the needs of each organization with a process designed to surface critical issues, identify root causes, build effective solutions, monitor progress and implement.

With a scope that ranges from system and organizational interventions to work with individuals, our focus is on the heart of the relationship among the individual, the organization and the community. We believe that organizational and community prosperity are built on enabling each person to fulfill his or her potential.

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## Our Services

We work with individuals and groups in your organization to drive performance and development for both the short and long term. As result people will choose to work in your organization and will prosper there.

We bring solutions when you need to:

- Reverse declining revenues and performance
- Revitalize your workforce
- Stem the loss of key talent
- Redirect your organization to new areas
- Stop losing customers or market share
- Penetrate new markets
- Combat aggressive competitors
- Handle major change
- Break down communication barriers

- Energize your leadership team
- Successfully build on an acquisition or merger

Our proprietary services include:

- State-of-the-art tools to take the pulse of your organization and then move to action
  - Web enabled systems
  - Experts to gather and analyze information, moving your organization to action
- Individual leadership coaching to give you world class leadership capabilities
  - Leaders who know themselves and their aspirations, build their capabilities and become catalysts developing others
- Workshops to build interpersonal skills in your organization so that:
  - Communication is timely, concise, accurate and personal
  - People listen to each other
  - Negotiations are quick and effective
  - Differences create rather than destroy value
  - Teams move forward, get results and quickly commercialize new products and services
  - People understand and link their motivations to your organizational needs
  - Your teams understand what it takes to create a committed, energized workforce
  - People use their time well
- Systems that make it easy to drive performance and build capabilities by:
  - Linking objectives throughout the organization
  - Strengthening key competencies
  - Making sure you have the bench strength where and when you need it
  - Giving people tools to take charge of their own careers, development and have a major long term influence on your organization
- Proprietary simulation and modeling techniques that let you explore how to maximize the value of your workforce
  - Move from guessing what might happen to looking in depth at the financial impact of different approaches