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2001 GLOBAL READERS' CHALLENGE ENTRY
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Front-Line Managers “Ask” to Lead Relationships

submitted by :

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What is the big idea? (50 - 100 words)

Everyday organizations are “working backwards” using hard managerial skills to empower those on the front lines of operations. Essentially giving them the tools to help them ask/answer for themselves the all-important question “How are we doing?” Why not do the same for softer leadership skills? Giving front-line managers a tool/activity for leading relationships by developing a secondary customer feedback through “asking” and sharing the answers to “How are we doing?” The empowerment movement blossomed with TQM, even changing the structures of enterprises, so more than ever we need to compliment and balance it, not necessarily change it, with a form of TQL.

What was your creative spark? (50 - 100 words)

Managers, on the front lines of operations, frustrated both professionally and emotionally by the seemingly inevitable caught-in-the-middle syndrome. Having been promoted for their abilities and comprehension of “what” needed to be done from Management, yet looking in everyday operations for parallel solutions and actions for the “how”. Often the principal source of support coming through the same channels as the “what”, in the form of programs and procedures. Problem being, in daily operations, it’s hard to keep team members interested, motivated, participating, learning and focused on a continual stream of such directives, even when disguised.

Why is the idea so compelling? (50 - 100 words)

Realizing that managers on the front lines must have activities to lead relationships that are basic and simple enough to address the needs of a workforce diverse in values, education and situations. One leading element we all have in common (even in the workplace) is our human experience. One such experience, the process of “asking” (not always verbal or even directed to others) works here! For from the time we were all first able to communicate we have used it to learn, participate, demonstrate intentions, assess, get feedback, focus, and even take ownership – when you ask the question you own the answer!

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If you have submitted an entry, we will let you know if you are selected in the next couple weeks. If you are interested in participating in next year's Fast 50 Readers' Challenge, submit your information [here](#).

Otherwise, look out for the first-ever Fast 50 in the March 2002 issue of Fast Company and [fastcompany.com!](#)

How or why did the idea spread? (50 - 100 words)

Not a new concept but one that got lost in the hierarchical growth of corporate pyramids. The missing links for connecting the “how” back to the “what”. Demonstrated by a mentor who had used the process of asking to span both time and growth as a tool to grow an enterprise from start to almost two thousand operational teams over a quarter century. Understanding that the organization’s “ends” must become the “means” for the front lines to execute daily operations. For example, for an organization to realize Customer Focus the front-line manager must have the leadership activities to create ‘focus’ (as a verb or action) and then direct it towards customers.

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