

It would be great if...

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Want some useful feedback from your key stakeholders? Send them this conversation starter – “It would be great if...” – and schedule an appointment for one-on-one follow up. Ask them to finish the sentence. Challenge them to think big. Anything goes. No bad ideas. Can they make 5 sentences? 10? 20?

Fast forward 3 months. The feedback is plentiful, and you’ve got a laundry list of aspirations and frustrations. Some are valid. Others are trite. A few items are gems – worthy of an executive summary, a brief project plan, and a cursory budget. But who? Who can take on another project? Who has time to make the “great if...” happen?

Outsource the gems

Often the fastest, most cost-effective way to put the most valuable ideas into action is to outsource. Instead of spending time assembling an internal team, focus energy on discovering the return-on-investment. If you outsource the implementation, you increase the capabilities of the team, and accomplish more new work. If you internalize the implementation, you shuffle the workload of the team, and risk delaying the current to make room for the new.

Project Management Jump-start

In February, the AMC Technology Team responded to the “It would be great if...” with a list of 17 ideas. After ranking, the top priority was for staff education in project management. We quickly created an executive summary, goals & objectives, ROI indicators, and simple budget. After some debate, we decided to contract a PMP-certified technology-focused project leader for 90 days. Their payback was immediate. In that short engagement, he created project plans that we use as templates, oriented the team to basic PMI methodologies supporting those plans, and facilitated the search for project software.

There must be a better way to...

In the midst of the “It would be great if...” appointment for feedback, solicit input on a related topic: “There must be a better way to...” Too often, associations do not offer a forum for staff to express frustrations with status-quo systems or processes. And “suggestion boxes” imply the suggestor provides the solution. This open ended conversation starter helps uncover time-wasters, expensive workarounds, and unproductive business rules mandated prior to current systems.

Remote Control Learning

New AMC staff needs to get up to speed quickly on our internal productivity applications. The sooner a new hire learns the tools, the faster they will be collaborative, and the more likely they will feel valuable on their team. To meet this challenge, our technical trainer creates self-paced, on demand, web based training. Many associations do not have full time trainers, and are saying “There must be a better way to train our new staff on the basics. Sending them off-site to multi day classes are not cost effective.” Many of those associations outsource application training to

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AMC. We deploy the courses they need via the web, combining stock and custom courses to meet their unique needs.

I would be more productive if...

The 3rd conversation starter is your key stakeholders opportunity to be selfish. “I” is the operative word in the sentence. How can you help them be more *fill-in-the-blank*? [productive, successful, empowered, discovered, recognized] Some of the feedback may be impractical to act on, but some may be very straightforward to deliver. Until you ask, you won’t know.

Meeting registrations

I would be more productive if... “someone else could set up the meeting logistics in the database, and enter the pre-registered attendees.” This was the feedback from one of our external project clients a year ago. She was trying to budget a temp staffer for assistance in the busiest months of her year. The temps were relatively inexpensive, but the training curve was not short, the timing was not always predictable, and lessons learned from one meeting were not easily transferable to the next person. To avoid these frustrations, she now out sources her meeting set-ups and registrations to AMC Data Entry Team. Our full-time staff are her team, trained and ready to use when she needs.

Ask. Define. Budget. Outsource.

Brian Brylow, Chief Technology Officer at RW Baird in Milwaukee, introduced me to the 3 conversation starters. We’ve modified them for brainstorming the possibilities for outsourcing at AMC. Internally, we find opportunities to increase staff productivity. Externally, we uncover customers for a-la-carte services. Whether we’re outsourcing to a business partner, or providing outsourced services to a customer, the motivations are similar. Outsourcing is often the fastest, most cost effective way to implement the new ideas, creative solutions, or collaborative approaches.