

## Settling for More in Your Business

Challenging the Myths That Destroy Your Business Relationships-  
and Kill your Organization

My wife and life partner, Bobbie, and I co-authored the groundbreaking relationship book, *Settle for More: You Can Have the Relationship You Always Wanted...Guaranteed!* While the book was born out of our clinical work with couples and our personal experience in our relationship, we have seen that the principles found in the Settle for More model are applicable to all relationships, including and particularly those relationships we categorize as “business.” We invite you to go to [www.settleformore.com](http://www.settleformore.com) to learn more about the model in detail. The following discussion on Settling for More in Your Business draws on that model.

**Introduction:** The “Business World.” Many, both in and outside of that world speak of it as if it is something foreign, operating separately and independent of the larger world with in which it lies...having its own culture complete with values, ethics, rules and laws. But is it? It is our opinion that the business world and concomitant culture cannot be separated from the world of those individuals who walk through the doors of and operate within the confines of commerce every day. Thus, the way we are in our living room is the way we will be in the board room...and vice versa. It’s all about relationships....and in this area we are one trick ponies.

Raising the bar on expectations of, and holding ones self to the highest standard in relationships, is quite simply the answer to transforming both personal and business relationships. Understanding this can serve to expand ones ability to operate **successfully** and with **significance** in both, if they chose to. What follows is an exploration of this hypothesis.



**W**hether it is the Mission Statement, the company retreat, the performance review, the notion of flex time or some other ‘intervention’ meant to tweak organizational performance, these well meaning strategies have most likely been a part of a consultants recommendation for which he/she was paid a handsome sum.

According to research from Harvard Business School, the business consulting industry generates about **\$100 billion** in annual revenues from U.S. consultants. Punch in “Business Consultants” on Google and you will generate 97,500,000 hits...in 0.21 seconds. There is no end of people who will tell you what to do or not do at the drop of a hat. And it would seem there is no end to the number of decision makers ready to pay for infinite wisdom and ideas to cure a range of ills and take the organization to top form, buffed out for the economic competition.

Organizational consultants come in a wide variety of shapes, colors and stripes with equally varied credentials and expertise. For the most part they perform a necessary and vital function; providing independent objective observation, assessment, ‘diagnoses’ and if necessary, recommended interventions. The proliferation of consultants attests to a perceived need for their services and an expectation of positive outcomes. Many times expectations are met and exceeded...and many times they are not.

What is it that accounts for the variability between successful, effective consultation and the not so successful or effective? This is the kind of stuff of which graduate business school case studies are made. So we are not going to make that the subject of this piece. What we will say is that most consultations at some point address the ‘culture’ of the organization they are observing in trying to understand and explain that organization. And well they should.

The *organizational culture* is comprised of the attitudes, experiences, beliefs and values of an organization.

It has been defined as "the specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organization and that control the way they interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization. Organizational values are beliefs and ideas about what kinds of goals members of an organization should pursue and ideas about the appropriate kinds or standards of behavior organizational members should use to achieve these goals. From organizational values develop organizational norms, guidelines or expectations that prescribe appropriate kinds of behavior by employees in particular situations and control the behavior of organizational members towards one another." (Hill & Jones, 2001)

Consultants develop strategies for senior management in order to alter, shape or change *the* corporate culture to reflect management values. As such, they may well run head on into extant ‘sub-cultures’ within the organization. Frequently, divisions, workgroups, departments, etc., will have developed a culture of their own that can at times take on a ‘rogue’ status.

It is our observation that the cultures found in corporations, both those supported by management and the various subcultures, reflect the presence of *myths* that can often do serve to sabotage the organization. While these myths may be recognized for what they are...myths or legends, fiction or untruths and thus have no real standing...more often than not they are assumed to be ‘truths.’ After all, the meta- or macro-culture from which all consultants come is replete with the ‘myths’ that shape our thinking and behaviors. Bobbie and I write about this extensively elsewhere and make the point that myths in the American culture sabotage our relationships and keep us from getting what we really want. Thus, consultants coming from that culture serve as unknowing carriers of those myths, unwittingly smuggling them into the organizations they consult in true Trojan horse style. The lenses through which they view and assess organizations are tinted by those myths and thus their perceptions and ultimately their recommendations are as well. And the myths take root and proliferate in true virus fashion

It is also our observation that by understanding these myths and focusing attention and resources on dispelling them, the probability of consultations resulting in positive change and bringing about the transformation into a *Settle for More* organization will increase significantly.

What are these myths? There are many...some quite evident, others difficult to ferret out. But the common denominators are, they are held by the majority of decision makers in one form or another and as such are grist in the decision making process having a direct affect on those decisions. Here is a sampling:

### **Myth #1: Competition is healthy for the Organization:**

**C**ompetition is the life blood upon which most of us were raised. While there is a great deal of variability between genders on how competition played out in our developmental years it was definitely ubiquitous. Both males and females participating in sports are imbued with various mantras... ‘Competition is *good*,’ ‘we learn valuable life lessons through competition,’ etc.

Within-gender competition both on and off the playing field, is the arena within which much of our informal social instruction takes place. While some of us were fortunate to have coaches who used the sports metaphor to teach us valuable lessons and Truths about life, most did not. And socially, very few had coaches to mentor them in the ways of really how to **define, be in, and have** successful relationships. It was our first experience of ‘on the job training’ where by trial and error we developed our own Relationship Intelligence Quotient (RIQ).

The sources of information from which we learned about relationships were ‘friends,’ movies, books, our parents, our friend’s parents, television, popular music, opera, comics, newspaper, and a plethora of other resources. From the moment an infant arrives in this world it is bombarded non-stop by a stream of relationship images. There is a statistic that says by the time a child in this country reaches the age of two, it has been exposed to over **1,000,000,000** images that define and describe relationships as held by the culture.

And just what is that ‘norm,’ that constant, that cultural definition of Relationship? An excellent way to get a quick look at how the culture holds relationships is to view the most popular situation comedy on television. When I was growing up it was the *Honeymooners* with Jackie Gleason as Ralph and his long-suffering wife, Alice. In my 30’s it was Archie Bunker and Edith in *All in the Family*. A couple of seasons ago it was *Everybody Loves Raymond* and currently there are a number of prime-time examples defining the culture’s view of relationship; *2 ½ Men*, *King of Queens* and perhaps the best example, *Desperate Housewives*. Over the last 40 years, while the characters and situations have changed, the successful sitcoms have all been caricatures of ‘Relationship’ as held by the culture. As a side note, we view these shows as

humorous...but they are not the least bit funny when they to take place in our own living rooms

Thus, the personal RIQ, reflects the dominant norms of the culture within which we were raised...all of which reflected the culture within which *its* members were raised...which reflected the culture within which *its* members were raised, etc., etc., etc, ad nauseam. You get the point.

Now most of us can point to an individual in our youth that stood out as ‘different’ or ‘significant;’ a coach, a teacher, a pastor, a buddy, someone who seemed to know about values and how to be a ‘good person.’ And while they had an impact on us, it should be no wonder why we did not take their lessons and run with them wholesale, leading lives that rival the Saints! It is because they were a voice alone in the social wilderness. **It is clear: the culture conspires to have relationships fail.** Thus, gaining most of our information from and aping cultural standards and norms (the *Real* ones that are reflected in our statistics, not those we post and to which we pay lip service) is guaranteed to perpetuate a population that at times reflects an RIQ in single digits.

All those things we learned through trial and error about how to be in relationships, e.g., be a bully to get what you want; don’t challenge the bully; play along to get along; challenge authority in irresponsible ways; act out, to stand out; melt into the woodwork and keep a low profile so you won’t stand out; be a ‘mean girl’ or ‘mean boy’ to insure people will follow you and that you will control the popularity matrix; don’t challenge the ‘mean girl’ or ‘mean boy’ in order to be included; never tell anyone how you really feel; protect yourself at all times; make someone else the butt of jokes to avoid being the one who is picked on and made fun of; only present who you think others want you to be; be someone you are not in order to be sure you are someone who will be accepted; gossiping and back stabbing are ways to develop friendships and exclude others; its OK to go after something that is not yours if you want it; hurting someone’s feelings will keep you from being the person who is hurt; a way to rise to the top is to put others down; avoid being odd person out at all costs...make someone else the odd person out but do not tell them directly...tell someone else; pretend that nothing hurts...unless it elevates you.....and all of the other variants of **the brutal socializing process endured by all and experienced directly by most children shape our relationship template.**

Should you be one who did not experience this as a child, either as the victim or the perpetrator, and doubt the validity of the above description, a quick review of the literature will be quite enlightening. I would further recommend two excellent books, *Mean Girls* and *Raising Cane*, to gain a quick snapshot of the culture that exists in the halls of our primary educational system where our daughters and sons spend the greatest percentage of their waking hours.

It is our contention that this has resulted in a culture that is relationship-impaired. It is the culture from where you came and in which you live and work. It is the culture that has supplied you with your view of the world and how to operate within that world. So, fast forward from the lessons learned about competition from our childhood and adolescent

culture. Sure, you may say “well, that was in my childhood...I am grown now and can see that what I learned about relationships and competition are counter productive so I don’t do that anymore (whatever “that” was for you in your youth).” This may be true, but is it true for the culture in general?

The data and I would argue quite to the contrary. Just take a look at the world around you. Take a look at the community around you. Take a look at your neighborhood, your organization, your family...yourself. While the residual affects of lessons learned as a youth might not seem so apparent, they are there...more sophisticated perhaps, but they are there. They play a deep and active role in how you view, relate to and interact with those within and outside of your organizational culture.

Realizing and understanding this is the first step towards transformation. For it is no more accurate to say “competition is *not* healthy for the organization” than it is to affirm the healthiness’ of competition. To be able, that is to have the ability to discern when it *is* or *is not* healthy is to be able to engage competition in a positive, productive and in a larger sense, mindful way that is consistent with being a responsible world citizen. And discernment is **impossible** in the absence of understanding the soil within which the roots of your internalized competitive nature were planted and have flourished.

As a starting point in this business of discernment let’s see what Webster has to say in terms of synonyms for competition. I prefer in this instance to look at the synonyms rather than a specific definition in that they give a much more robust feeling of the sense of the word as it is commonly used by the culture. So:

*competition, Syn. rivalry, contention, contest, striving, (common) strife, struggle, controversy, coping with, opposition, pairing off, meeting, engagement, candidacy, racing, trial, athletic event, contest for prize or advantage, pitting of strength or wits, combat, fight, game, conflict, debate, tournament, attempt to outsell, rivalry for patronage, attempt at betterment, clash, counteraction, encounter, match, antagonism, joust.*

This does not sound remotely like anything I would want to foster *within* my organization. *Between* organizations perhaps, and I say perhaps because as a universal statement I am not to certain I would want competition as a constant hallmark of my relationships with other organizations. This will have the ring of heresy or sacrilege to those who worship at the alter of ‘healthy’ competition. But my observation has been that competition is viewed as ‘healthy’ by the person who wins and once the winning ceases, so does their view that the activity is healthy. I know all about the mantra that says, “It is not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game.” In sports, for some, this is absolutely true; not the majority, but for some. However, you will rarely hear these words uttered as the corporate mantra in those that support and encourage competition. Rather, the words of Vince Lombardi are most likely to ring in the halls of corporate America: “winning isn’t everything, it is the *only* thing.”

At first glance, these two statements appear to be mutually exclusive: It is not whether you win or lose, but how you play the game vs. winning isn't everything, it is the only thing. But are they? And here in lies the distinction that can transform performance in your organization.

Whether the two statements are complimentary or contrary to one another will depend entirely on your definition of and meaning attributed to "win" or "winning." If your definition of winning in the classic competitive sense is consistent with the synonyms above, then you are severely limiting your organization. It will foster secretiveness, defensiveness, information being withheld, communication failures, infighting, rumor, sabotage, and a culture of yes-men. If however you hold for "winning" actually being consistent with Webster's antonyms for competition, you are on the right track to experiencing your organizations full potential. Hear what Webster has to say:

*competition, Ant. partnership, alliance, co-operation*

Organizations that foster internal competition, by definition, are at the least, limiting possibilities and at the worst, encouraging a host of interpersonal interactions that can lead to the demise of the organization. Organizational values that encourage competition between employees serve the purpose of reducing the possibility of effective 'teamwork.' While encouraging and rewarding individual performance because it is 'better' than another's may stimulate additional effort and thus an increase in whatever the target activity is (car sales, clean floors, hours worked...whatever), over the long haul it will most certainly be counterproductive. Any time 'winning' requires a corresponding loss, the organization loses.

Most organizations have realized this. Incentive programs, face-to-face conversations, 'open door' policies, flex time, etc., all designed to increase the individual's experience of being valued and valuable, are becoming standard corporate fare. ***But in the absence of explicitly and specifically revamping the notion of competition*** these interventions will fall far short. Think about it. Individuals bring their personal developmental experiences to the social structures in which they operate. Thus, the culture of those structures reflects the blend of experiences of the structure members. Individual attitudes, beliefs, values become those of the culture. Lessons learned early in development become the basis for the corporate culture, how the culture *is*...which in turn directly affects and impacts the behaviors of members of the structure.

Most interventions which are meant to increase individual satisfaction in the work place target behaviors...either individual or those between individuals...in an attempt to get people to "do" things differently. The only problem with this logic is that we can't change how people are "being" by having them "do" things differently. We have numerous examples of massive failures that clearly demonstrate you cannot get there from here...that is, you cannot change how people are being by giving them a list of things to "do". You cannot build a truly cooperative work force with group retreats, trust exercises, communication workshops, etc.

The corporate social structure will continue to reflect the beliefs of individuals within that culture; and while somewhat more sophisticated, the lessons learned in our youth will cause us replicate the destructive behaviors seen in our youth. Only by directly addressing beliefs about “competitiveness” and “winning” and the basis for these beliefs within the specific business cultural will you be able to effectively eliminate the ubiquitous and insidious destructive behaviors stemming from those beliefs:

So, is competition healthy for the organization? Internally, no. Externally, it depends. And you really can’t say more than that. The real question is, what do you want to accomplish through competition? Whatever it is, you will be more successful and the members of your organization will benefit far more from a program designed to increase and engender cooperation. So, change the mantra and infect your organizational culture with

**“Cooperation is healthy for the organization!”**

## **Myth #2: Tell them only what they need to know.**

**W**e don’t know the origin of this admonition but it seems to stem from a point of view that if you keep information fragmented you are more able to control outcomes. And it does seem as if it goes hand-in-hand with myth #1 above. “Keep your cards close to the vest” “don’t confuse me with details” “too much information” “what you don’t know won’t hurt you” are all variants of “tell them only what they need to know” and are all commonly heard utterances within the business/management community despite there being absolutely no data to support them. In fact, there are data to the contrary that suggest keeping individuals fully informed has both direct and indirect positive consequences.

Myth #2 has something in common with many of the business fables. And that is, it focuses on and is supposed to serve, and be in the best interests of...*The Business!* Now, most organizations will tout their interest in the individual. And this is a big market for consultants...developing and selling programs targeting employees. I received an email recently from an outfit that caters to businesses with a variety of “how to” tapes, cassettes and audio conferences. The email subject line announced “12 Ways to Motivate Staff and Boost Performance” and then listed a number of upcoming audio conferences with titles such as: The Kindness Revolution: The Company-Wide Culture Shift That Inspires Phenomenal Customer Service; Painless Performance Reviews: Why to Talk, How to Talk, and What to Talk About; and How to Reward and Retain Good People; Harness the Power of Your Company’s Most Important Asset: Your Frontline Staff.

It seems the strategy to better organizational performance is to identify and tweak the psyche of the individual...as if they are saying, the tweaked employee will be a “good” employee with the operative word here being “good.” And in so many cases, employee satisfaction and improvement has as the end goal, a payoff for the organization. And well

it should. But it will not, no matter how well structured the program and qualified the trainer/consultant/coach is who delivers the program...if the vessel into which the heady elixir of employee enlightenment is poured is itself constructed of the old attitudes, beliefs and myths. Because they are the saboteurs of good intentions...and the tweaking will fail.

For it is not the employee that needs tweaking...rather, the attitudes, beliefs and myths that form the culture of the organization should be the focus of the tweak...and usually far more than a tweak is necessary. Transformation is what is required and can not be accomplished through a series of how-to's or you know... "7 keys to" or "10 Steps to..." or any number of what we call "doings."

This is much like a conversation exploring top-down v bottom-up management, the latter the result of the dehumanizing affects of and reaction to the former found in the management styles of the mid 1880's. James Hoopes takes on both in "False Prophets." But perhaps the book's lasting value lies in Hoopes' discussion of why they are both basically dishonest. For if one continues on where Professor Hoopes leaves us, it is clear that neither form can be truly successful without first understanding what it is that they each bring to the table that makes it unworkable...*not* what is one bringing to the party that is unworkable that other can change. Or what is the other putting on the table that is not workable but that they feel they can make work by covering over or obfuscating or ignoring it.

"Tell them what they need to know" is a sophisticated remnant of solid top down management...only a step or two above, if that, of "they don't need to know anything other than what they are supposed to do." If this or any variant of top down management is a part of your executive management strategy, implicitly or explicitly, conscious or unconscious, then no matter how well intentioned your programs of "great things to do to do great things" might be, it will ultimately falter because it is based on a culture that has demonstrated failure in the past and will predict failure in the future.

The answer for transformation is to include everyone in the information loop and give them all the information they can carry...the good and the bad. Open access to information has an interesting affect on an organization. It is an indispensable prerequisite for integrity, a goal most organizations profess to strive for; it keeps people honest, it motivates and guides, it includes and provides certainty and trust for those that are the recipients. Me?...that is the sort of organization in which I want to participate.

### **Myth #3: The customer is always right**

**N**othing is *always* anything, including the customer. Yet somewhere, someone looked at the business of the business and figured out if they give people what they want, that will be a way to insure loyalty, word of mouth endorsement and

the positioning of their organization as a customer friendly commerce...which translates to business on the books. It doesn't matter what the business is...wholesale, retail, shoes, groceries, advertising or whatever...the mantra, "the customer is always right" is ubiquitous.

The origin of the phrase in the United States is credited to Marshal Field with Harry Gordon Selfridge being identified as the individual who popularized its use in London, both in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century. Neither intended to be taken literally. Their objective was to have their staff make the customer feel special by **behaving as if they were right whether or not that was true**. Both Field and Selfridge trained their employees to the point where customers genuinely felt unique when they interacted . From the outset business types have debated the appropriateness of promoting a disingenuous relationship with customers.

From the outset the business community has debated the Field/Selfridge model of customer relations. There are those who feel that it is not good policy to train employees to be disingenuous with clients/customers. Others, many who frequently are found to subscribe to the notion of competition discussed above, feel that "all's fair in business" and see nothing inappropriate about shining on the customer or client. Ask, and most will tell you that the best place to be is somewhere in between.

Is it? Why not do or say whatever will translate into a stronger bottom line? After all, if the customer is right, then treating him or her that way makes sense. If they are wrong, what do I possibly lose by not challenging them, particularly if they remain a customer?

The answer is simple...it is not true. Bobbie and I line up with those that say disingenuousness while it might lead to a short term gain will in the long run be the stake driven into the heart of the business, inflicting a permanent if not fatal wound. The impact of executives sanctioning and encouraging employee-client relationships that trade on falsehoods goes far beyond those relationships. It sets the stage for dishonesty and disingenuousness to become a part of the corporate culture. And it will.

To operate in a relationship in a way that pretends something is the way it is not is to operate outside of integrity. Training employees to conduct their relationships in the absence of integrity with customers/clients is to train them to be out of integrity with the organization. The rationale for doing so does not matter.

Both the customer/client and the organization are served when the organization takes the high road. Developing a corporate culture that demands customers/clients be treated honestly, respectfully, with patience, kindness and gentleness supports and makes possible employee personal growth and will insure the secure client/customer base hoped for. Allowing the corporate culture to stand for less is to limit the possibilities for the organization, the individuals in that culture and those it touches.

In summary the distinction between the business culture and the larger social culture within which it operates (community, town, state, country or world) is artificial...who we are in our homes is who we are in our work. Let me repeat that. **Who we are in our homes is who we are in our work.** The individual in concert with other individuals creates the culture...its values, attitudes, experiences and beliefs. We bring our collective histories to the culture; histories which include the lessons learned from infancy to adulthood. Those lessons are responsible for the individual's repertoire of coping skills, the ways they deal with the world in which they operate. Most of these skills serve us well...and some do not. Those that do not limit us individually and when introduced to the corporate culture, limit that culture. At the same time we as a culture have developed a host of myths that take on the cloak of 'truisms' which do not account for our individual skill weaknesses if you will.

Traditionally, we attempt organizational improvement by attending to one or the other, the myths of the culture or the developmental limitations of the individual. However, until we identify and understand the myths of our culture **and** account for individual developmental limitations, we severely limit the possibilities for the organization as well as the individuals in that organization. To bring about organizational transformation to a Settle for More culture, requires that both be addressed simultaneously. Doing so will transform the relationships of those within the organization which leads to a transformation in their relationships with others outside of the organization.

The overall result? The organization wins!



Bobbie and I thank you for spending this time with us and letting us share our *Settle for More* thoughts with you. We welcome your feedback, questions and inquiries. We can be contacted through our website, [www.settleformore.com](http://www.settleformore.com) or directly at [info@settleformore.com](mailto:info@settleformore.com)