

A close-up photograph of a brass compass resting on an old, textured map. The compass needle is pointing towards the upper right. The map shows various geographical features and text, including the word "Canal" visible in the bottom right corner. The overall lighting is warm and golden.

# Seven Low-Cost Tactics for Fostering Alignment and Innovation

May, 2008



# Agenda

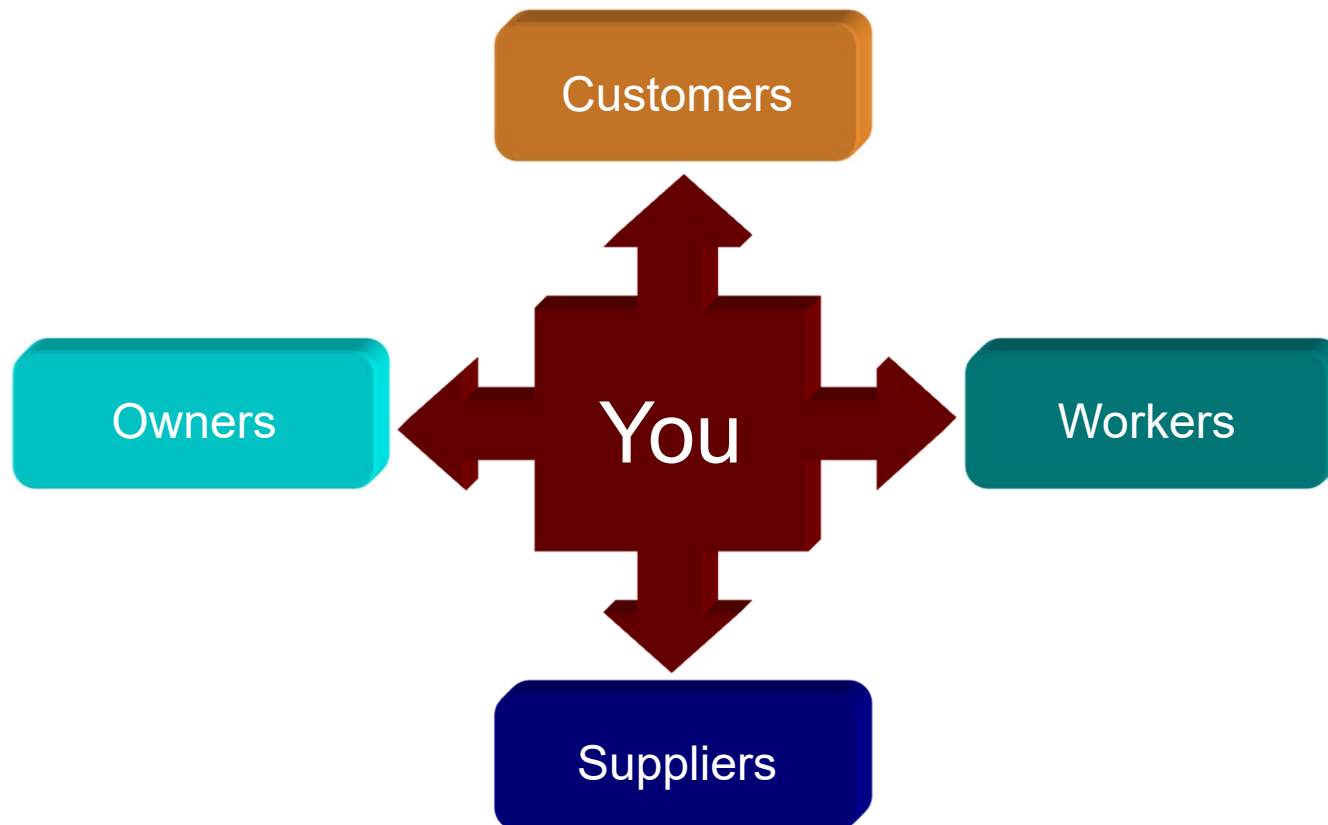
- **Introduction: Your Customer's Customer**
- **Seven Tactics**
  - Alignment
  - Innovation
- **Three Special Cases**
- **Concluding Remarks**



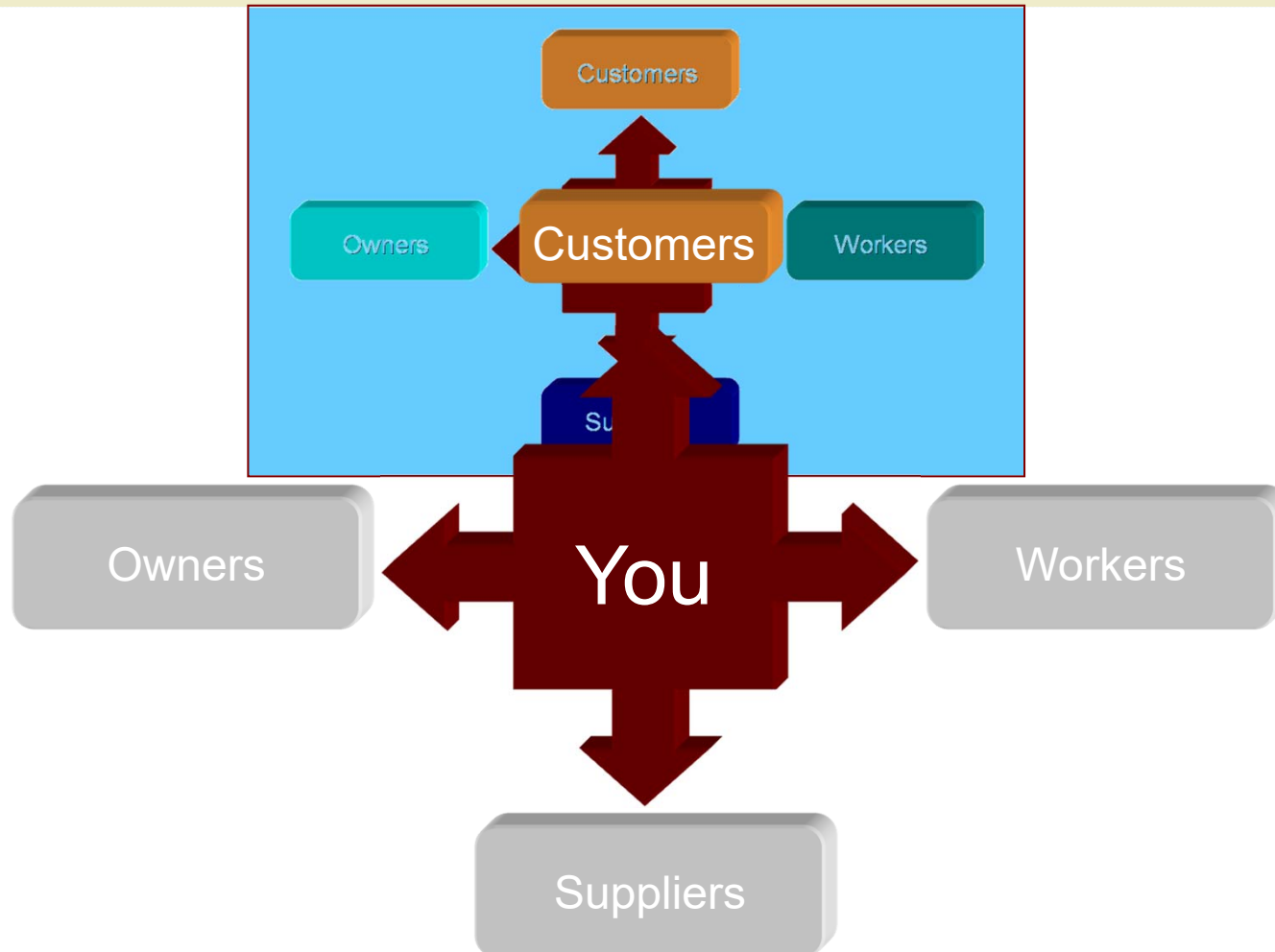
# Your Customer's Customer



# An Organization's Stakeholders

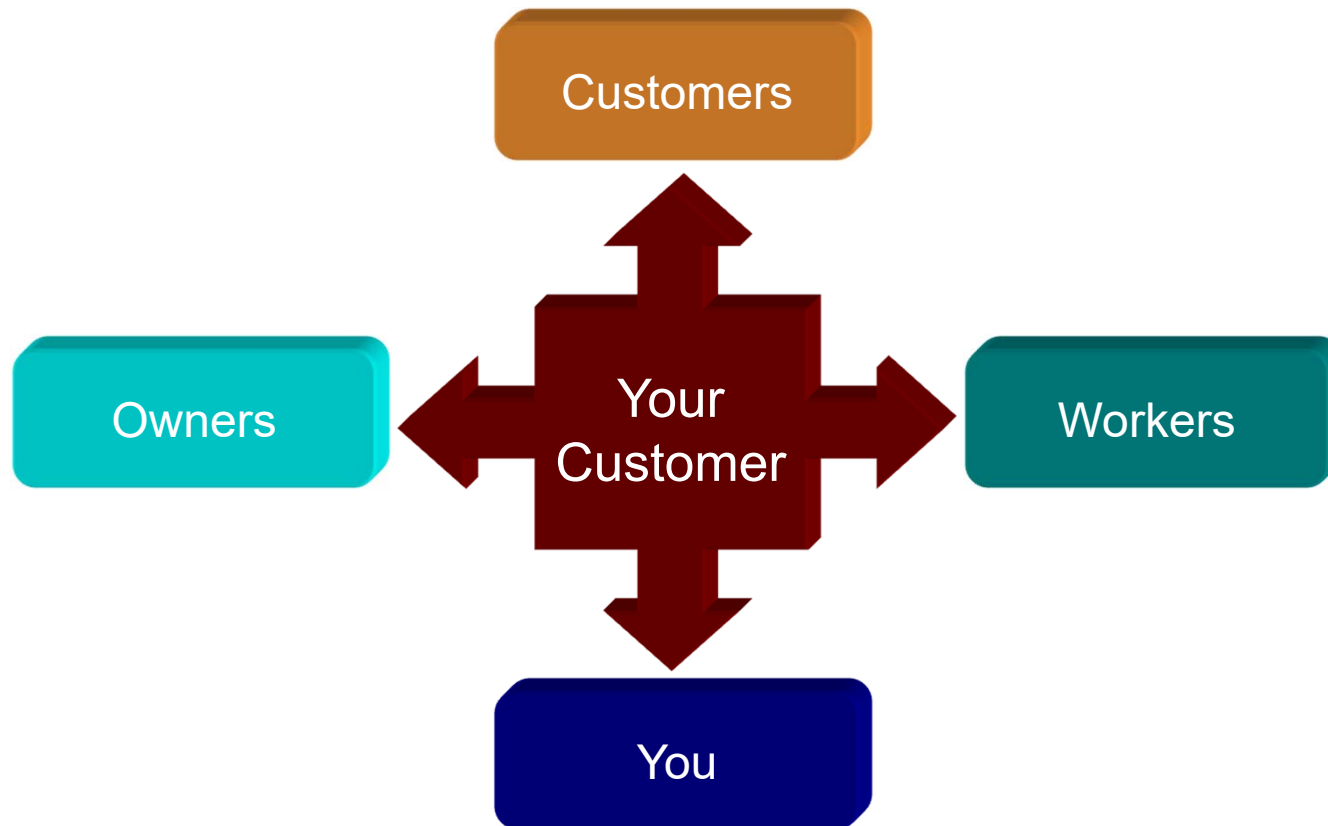


# An Organization's Stakeholders





# Your Customer's *Customer*





# Thinking Two Levels Out

- **What demands are your customers' customers demanding of them?**
- **"Keep your boss's boss off your boss's back"**
- **Your Suppliers' Suppliers: The Supply Chain reality**
- **Your Employee's eco-system includes their family**

**This will sensitize you to watching for 'incoming' changes...**



# Seven Tactics



# 1. Trends Sessions from Your Customers

## ■ Description

- Have the departments (your ‘customers’) give periodic “Trends” presentations *to you* and your team, about how their business/environment is changing

## ■ Elements

- Changes in their priorities and transaction types
- New regulations and constraints (esp. new reporting requirements!)
- New technology options and usage
- Challenges and risks they face
- Successes in recent past
- Personnel changes
- Performance evaluation of your team...

## ■ Things to Note

- Listen, listen, listen
- Try to create peer-level relationships among the staff



## 2. Joint Brainstorming Sessions

### ■ Description

- Staff-with-Staff meetings to brainstorm process improvements

### ■ Elements

- Statements/description of their processes and/or workflow
- “How to trim a minute off this process”
- “How to trim a dollar off this cost”
- “How to reduce defects by 1 case per time period”

### ■ Things to Note

- Requires terminology synch-up (needs to be there anyway)
- Might lead to ‘out of the box’ suggestions, but mostly will focus on current processes
- Make heroes of them AND of the process
- Make it fun...



## 3. Oblique Discovery

### ■ Description

- Using oblique questions to uncover priorities, issues, opportunities

### ■ Elements

- Innocent questions...
- “If I could give you a dedicated IT resource to support just your group, what kind of skill set would you prefer?”
- “If I could give you a dedicated IT resource for you to use as needed, what would you be likely to use them for?”
- “If I could give you a dedicated IT resource to support just your initiatives, which projects would you put them on?”
- “If I could provide free advanced technology training to one of your people, who would it be?”
- And always ask “why?”
- Surfaces many things, including priorities, un-met needs, key employees, etc

### ■ Things to Note

- Don’t set expectations: “From time to time, I request extra personnel for special support of the departments...I don’t often get it, but...”



## 4. Targets *Du Jour*

### ■ Description

- Interviewing your customers' for urgent changes in THEIR workloads

### ■ Elements

- Questions to ask after every change: bosses, re-org, 'crisis', budget period, etc...
- "What new projects will you need to initiate, given this new (boss, SOD, budget, crisis, etc)?"
- "What projects will you need to de-mote?"
- "How does this change the priorities of your existing workload?"
- "What kinds of additional or modified IT support do you anticipate these changes might require?"

### ■ Things to Note

- Start with commiseration: "I heard about the change—that's probably changing your workload rather significantly, isn't it?"
- "How close are you to the *something's-gotta-give* point, with all this new work?"
- If you can help here, you have earned a relationship that will serve both of you well...



## 5. Adopt-an-Expert

### ■ Description

- Create special relationships with influential, tech-oriented personnel

### ■ Elements

- Have your team and/or the department head identify a 'key technology user' for special support by IT
- "Adopt" them into meetings, training events, consultations, vendor briefings
- Automatic escalation on phone support
- Early briefings on new technology
- Have them lead meetings and use other R&R methods
- Contribute to their actual employee reviews, if possible

### ■ Things to Note

- Not only will they become a support adjunct (like they already are!), but they will be a priceless information conduit as to what the department is thinking about...
- They will also often become a 'sales force' for your initiatives (and/or 'benefit of the doubt' during roll-outs!) to their department



## 6. Innovation: Awards

### ■ Description

- Using Recognition tactics to foster innovation (and communication!)

### ■ Elements

- Periodic awards *to the departments*
- “Best new use of a spreadsheet...”
- “Fastest learner of (software ABC)”
- “Most innovative idea for improving XYZ”
- “Best cost-savings suggestion”
- Every broadcast medium: newsletter, BB’s, intranet, YouTube...

### ■ Things to Note

- You can also expand this—selectively—to IT/department ‘partnerships’ between staff (e.g. ‘best collaborative effort’)
- Get the department heads to suggest possible award winners too, but sensitize YOUR people to *look* for these (many benefits will accrue from this *alone*)



## 7. Innovation: Demo's

### ■ Description

- Exposing the departments to new technology, to get *them* to do the 'alignment'

### ■ Elements

- New technology demonstrations and/or exhibitions / Ask alignment questions:
  - “How could you use this feature in your current operation?”
  - “How could you use this extra performance in your current operation?”
  - “If I could save you \$X (or X minutes) by switching to this technology, how would you use that money/time?”
  - “What difference would it make if your software could run on this small of a system?”
  - “If I had one of these for you to play with, who in your group would you give it to—and why them?”
  - “Are any other schools like us using this technology in your type of department? Are they getting good press for it? Why?”

### ■ Things to Note

- This might best be done with senior management first, and if they approve, you then try this with their staff
- Macro-level: do a “mini trade-show” and have the attendees rank the various technologies as to potential for their function



# Special Cases



## Case 1: New Hires

- **Issue: New (Executive) Hires come in with expectations from experiences with previous IT groups**
- **You need to find out:**
  - If the experiences were positive
  - How positive they were
  - Why they were positive
  - (And ditto, in the case of ‘negative’)
  - What technologies they successfully used before (and will they ‘push’ for those at your school...?)
- **“What was the best thing about the previous IT group you worked with?”**
- **“What was the worst thing ...”**
- **“What was the most innovative use of IT you have seen in prior jobs?”**



## Case 2: Support for Fast Refresh

- **Fast Refresh is almost the only way to stay ahead of the cost-curve, in under-funded shops**
- **The Principle is simple: 2-3 year tech refresh produces:**
  - Much lower lifecycle/TCO costs (especially without years 4-5!)
  - More manageable footprint (via reduced footprint diversity)
  - And If you lease:
    - Lower invoice costs
    - Easier mgt (e.g., monthly versus ‘big bite’ budgets, asset tracking)
- **But...Faster refresh looks like “Technology for Technology’s sake”**
  - Always churning to latest-and-greatest, instead of “running it into the ground”
  - Highly visible invoice cost
  - “We don’t get to upgrade OUR specialty stuff that fast!”



# Fast Refresh for Lifecycle Savings

## ■ Imperatives:

- Set terminology to 'equipment' not 'technology' (e.g. fleets)
- Have your horror stories of 'forced upgrades' ready (if applicable) and honey stories of 'it finally works!'
- Document cash-out-the-door savings for the first year or two (create the 'presumption' in your favor)
- The above requires an audit-trail, so be sure to keep the records clean
- Cost-awareness communication programs will help



## Case 3: Innovation = Obsolescence

### ■ “Better is a euphemism for different”

- Main issue is that informal power (=> status!) changes
- Skill ownership is re-valued
  - Obsolescence and social status
  - Obsolescence and project morale
  - Obsolescence and negotiation

### ■ Imperatives:

- Early involvement (already done, often)
- Recognition events
- Progress “spokesperson”
- “Interpreter”



# Concluding Remarks



## Concluding Remarks

- **This kind of communication/listening is not our strong suit in IT...**
- **But it can be made into a *process* via some of these tactics**
- **Not all departments will open up communications like this with you—but they will once they see the successes of others**
- **Everybody is looking for trustworthy help—but they often fear the ‘costs’ of that help**
- **Make the meetings count! (“Meetings are where productive hours go to die...”)**
  
- **And if you do this right —your workload INCREASES!**



Thank you!