



THE WILKINS GROUP

# Tool Kit

Providing Tools for  
Productive Workplaces

SUMMER 2004

## IN THIS ISSUE

BACK TO SCHOOL

ORCHESTRATING  
TEAMWORK

**“With all  
its sham,  
drudgery,  
and broken  
dreams, it is  
still a  
beautiful  
world.  
Be cheerful.  
Strive to be  
happy.”**

— *Desiderata* —

## Back to school



**SHEILA WILKINS**

**I** digressed from my consulting practice this year to teach instrumental music in a local elementary school, making a return to my earliest career as a music teacher.

After 15 years of teaching, I left to enter the private sector, where I acquired skills in organizational alignment, teambuilding, management coaching, leadership development, facilitation, instructional design and delivery.

It was an enlightening experience to return to the public school classroom after many years as both corporate employee and independent performance improvement consultant.

Back in the schools, I found myself asking the questions that I would ask any corporate client:

- What are the outcomes of our educational system?
- What results do we expect?
- What competencies should students possess upon graduation?
- Are students fully prepared to enter the workplace and make an immediate contribution?
- Are the expectations we have of our educational system realistic?

While teaching this year, I discovered some themes common to both the public and the private sectors. Read on to share my discoveries.

## Orchestrating teamwork

**I**f you don't know where you're going, anywhere will do. Trite, but very true!

Effective leadership is critical for achieving results in the corporation and in the schoolroom.

Last September, I was asked to be an instrumental music teacher for the school year. I said yes because it had been many years since I'd taught young people. I like challenges, and I was interested in discovering if teaching had really changed much over the years.

My assignment was to teach beginning flute, clarinet, alto sax, trumpet, and trombone classes. I had between five

and ten students in each class.

### Goal Setting

At the outset of each class, the students and I set a year-long strategic goal: By the end of the school year, you will demonstrate your proficiency in playing the flute, clarinet, alto sax, trumpet, trombone.

Goals need to be translated into everyday language so people understand what it is they are expected to do. Translated, this particular goal meant: you'll be able to play all the primary basic notes on your chosen instrument as well as play a

***Continued on next page***

# Orchestrating teamwork

**Continued from front** concert B flat scale and concert B flat arpeggio accurately and musically. It was important to state the goal precisely and gain agreement from everyone.

## Selecting Metrics

Next, we then decided how we would measure our progress toward that goal. Some metrics were already established:

- Winter concert.
- District festival.
- Spring concert.

Each music program presented a different repertoire-incremental in difficulty and sophistication.

We also created quality metrics that included:

- Playing the correct notes consistently.
- Watching the conductor (me) fastidiously.
- Listening to each other regularly.
- Observing the tempo markings and dynamic levels accurately.

A long term goal is often easier stated than accomplished. Achieving results requires focused, consistent effort and a commitment to hang in there when the going gets tough.

## Determining Action Steps

To be achieved, most

goals require several intermediate objectives with specific action steps.

Learning to play an instrument can be a challenge, not only for the players, but also for the listeners. Getting started involves basic and incrementally challenging steps:

- Taking care of a musical instrument.
- Assembling the instrument; disassembling it.
- Producing a sound on an instrument without squeaks.
- Learning the fingering and positions for each note.
- Learning to read notes.

- Moving from one note to another to several notes in a musical phrase.
- Learning the language of music.

## Teamwork

By mid October we were operational; that is, students could assemble and disassemble their instruments properly, produce reasonably good tones, play four to five notes accurately. Preparing to perform was

the next step. That involved teamwork.

A music team is like a work team.

- The group must have a purpose or reason for working together. A musical piece requires several instruments playing different parts simultaneously.

- Group members must be interdependent; that is, they need each other's

skills, expertise and commitment to arrive at mutual goals. A musical selection does not sound whole if some of the instrumental parts are missing.

- The group must be accountable as a functioning unit within a larger organizational context. Each family of instruments must play its part of the piece accurately.

- The group members must coordinate laterally. Not all instruments play every note, play the same notes, or play at the same time.

- Significant face-to-face

interaction among group members is required. Each student must be competent at his/her individual part and each group of instrument must be in balance with the others.

- There are no individual stars; rather, there is a team of star performers.

Any team, even a musical group, is only as good as its members.

## Reaching Goals

As we prepared for each concert, all the required skills came into play. Beginning instruments, now a beginning band, readily achieved their stated goals for each concert because students were clear at the outset what they needed to do. They also realized it took teamwork to get there.

For the final concert of the year, one of the selections the band chose was *Highlights from Harry Potter*, a challenging piece even at the middle school level. With lots of practice, individually and collectively as a band, they played the selection extremely well. It sounded just like Harry Potter! Imagine the sense of personal satisfaction and team exhilaration at being able to stretch and achieve a goal beyond their expectations. It was heady!

## In Summary

- No matter what the situation, leaders must provide direction, set performance expectations, remove obstacles to getting the job done, and inspire and motivate their followers.

- Teams are more productive when members individually have a high commitment to deliver performance results.

- Teams have more fun, and having fun is integral to successful performance.



THE WILKINS GROUP

## Consulting and Training

- Leadership Development
- Team Development
- Instructional Design
- Training and Facilitation

2182 Gill Port Lane  
Walnut Creek, CA 94598  
925-937-6055; Fax: 925-939-2950  
Sheila@WilkinsGroup.com  
www.wilkinsgroup.com

## I'd appreciate a referral

I want to build my consulting practice now that my teaching assignment is completed.

Do you know of a company that could use my assistance with organization alignment, team development, leadership coaching, facilitation, or instructional design?

I am looking for companies that want assistance achieving their targeted business goals by systematically identifying and removing barriers to performance.

I will appreciate your referral and I will reward you generously if the referral becomes a customer.