

## Do we hold our cards too close to the vest?



**A** friend of mine joked the other day that it's too bad that everyone who knows how to run this country is either cutting hair or driving cabs. Have you ever noticed the incredible wisdom in both these segments of our population?

It was brought home to me recently. On my way to the airport at the end of a multi-day conference, a cab driver asked me if I and the other people who were part of the meeting work for the CIA. I asked him why he had that impression.

Well, he related, for days as he was driving people to and from restaurants in the evenings, the conversations were so hushed and clandestine that he imagined the group was involved in top security issues.

I laughed at the time, but I have to admit that the exchange continues to pass through my mind as I think of how we run our organizations.

Upon reflection, it seems that so much of what we do is focused on controlling information rather than sharing it. Meetings are typically scheduled with staff from the same level of management rather than with all who can bring something valuable to the table.

Envelopes go whipping around the office with "personal and confidential" stamped on them. The grapevine continues to be alive and well because employees find themselves having to guess at what is happening in the workplace rather than learning it directly from the appropriate sources.

Of course, this pattern of behavior is not happening all of the time, but from what I observe, it is more common than we probably care to admit.

Recently, I read a review of *Open-Book Management: The Coming Business Revolution*, by John Case. He argues that giving workers the organization's complete financial picture helps them work smarter.

His premise is that in this fast-changing and fiercely competitive world, managers need to do something radical to make their organizations as successful and profitable as possible. He advocates making all the financial information available to all staff—including compensation data.

His rationale is that this helps employees cut through the turf wars and special-interest pleading to truly identify the common objectives.

I have talked to several executives recently who are making financial information available to staff; in fact we are doing that at GWSAE minus the compensation figures.

Nonetheless, I can't help but feel that the cab driver was very astute. I am trying to be much more sensitive and less guarded about the information I communicate to others on a day-to-day basis. I've taken more risks lately and trusted more often. It continues to pay off.

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