



# VGM Playbook:

Developing Your Skills  
for Next Level Leadership



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# Letter From the President



**Leadership. It means something different to each one of us.** So how do you become not just a good leader, but a great leader if you have multiple expectations to meet? This question is why there are countless books, seminars, podcasts, quotes, and more about leadership. And it's why we are focusing our first playbook of 2020 on leadership.

Ronald Reagan said, "The greatest leader is not necessarily the one who does the greatest things. He is the one that gets the people to do the greatest things."

A simple quote with a difficult task. Motivating, encouraging, and developing others to do great things can be harder than doing the great things yourself.

This playbook is dedicated to leadership and helping you navigate the challenges of being a great leader. Being and building proven leaders is crucial to the success of your business, especially in our ever-changing industry. You and your team need to be prepared to handle the ins and outs together as a strong, flexible, proven leadership team. We will look at how leadership impacts culture, the importance emotional intelligence plays in leadership, and how to get out of your own way, allowing yourself to become a true leader—no matter what your role is within your organization.

We hope you enjoy our lineup of playbooks for 2020. We will also tackle other imperative topics such as data, human capital, and technology. Thank you for being a valuable part of our family. We look forward to relentlessly working for your success in 2020.

Kindest Regards,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Clint Geffert", with a long horizontal line extending to the right.

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# Changing Workplace Culture Through Values Discovery

By Sara Laures, Chief People Officer, VGM Group, Inc.

## The POWER OF ONE starts with YOU.

VGM is a great company staffed by great people, but even we need to have tough conversations with our employees now and then. I recently found myself in the uncomfortable position of having to dismiss a member of our team, citing a violation of VGM's code of conduct. When I mentioned this document, which they had dutifully signed on their first day with us during orientation, they responded with a confused look and a profound question: "What is the code of conduct, exactly?" I produced the document, complete with their signature, and went over the ways in which they'd violated its terms. When my meeting with them was over, I knew I'd made the right decision—but something about the whole thing left a bad taste in my mouth. How could I expect an employee to remember and abide by the rules of a document they signed their first day, only to never see it again?

After giving the matter some thought, I assembled a focus group of my peers and put the code of conduct up on the wall in front of them. For many, it was probably the first time they'd seen it since they'd signed it themselves. After a thoughtful discussion, we concluded that the document wasn't very compelling. In fact, it was written by an attorney, so I'm sure you can imagine the canned legalese. Anyone who's ever



signed one of these when starting a new job probably knows it exactly for what it is—a carefully prepared legal tool meant to protect the company from liability and create "accountability" among employees.

*What were we doing to keep our code of conduct in front of our people and continually remind them of what was expected?*

What about our accountability? What were we doing to keep our code of conduct in front of our people and continually remind them of what was expected? Shouldn't a code of conduct codify our values and affirm our employees? *What were our values, anyway?*



# Changing Workplace Culture Through Values Discovery continued

By Sara Laures, Chief People Officer, VGM Group, Inc.

These questions and the discussion that followed were the beginning of a long and rewarding process of discovery for us. We decided a code of conduct should be more than just a legal instrument. Instead, it could become a platform we could use to identify and communicate our core values in a way that would inspire employees to say “yes” to our company, our customers, and our mission every single day. It could help us craft a company culture that would attract the best people to work for us, and it could help us do a better job of onboarding, training, and engaging them after they started. It could even make us better leaders in the process.

*Your organization has values. They probably just aren't on paper yet.*

## The Discovery Process

This may sound like a tall order, but don't worry. Your organization has values. They probably just aren't on paper yet. Your first task is to get them there, and the best way to do that is to ask yourself a good prompting question and start writing down some answers. Good ones to consider might be these:

- Who are we on our best day?
- What would a picture-perfect day at our organization look like?
- What would every single one of our employees be doing on a day like that?

The answers to these questions will reveal the things that are important and meaningful to your business. Get your leadership team together and write them down. This is a brainstorming process, so don't be afraid if you come up with several ideas. That's a good thing! Need some inspiration? Think about the companies that have a positive reputation—those companies you like to do business with. Then, read up on those companies and learn about what values or culture they have in place that you could strive

to emulate. For me, I was inspired and impacted by [Caribou Coffee's values](#), of which they refer to as their “purpose and heart.”

Once you've collected all of your ideas together, it's time to start trimming. You don't want to hand your people a laundry list of new rules to follow at the end of this process. You want to give them a simple list of values that will be easy for them to understand, remember, and live out.

### Tips to Help You Refine Your Notes Into a Simple Set of Value Statements

- **Consolidate:** Look for trends and similarities in the ideas you've written down. Do some of your notes basically say the same thing? Is there a single phrase that can capture multiple ideas at once?
- **Clarify:** Keep your wording and your concepts short, simple, and sweet. Not only will this make your value statements easier for your people to understand and remember, but it will also make them easier to talk about later.
- **Generalize:** Avoid items that are job-, role-, or person-specific. Each item should be an ideal you want every member of your team to live and breathe as they do their work each day.
- **Humanize:** Psychological safety is the most important thing you can offer to your employees. Take a positive approach with your value statements. Don't create them as a means to judge, punish, or compare people. Rather, use them to create a common language for talking about who you are as a company and how you'd like your employees to work together and treat your customers.

If you'd like an example to work from, I've included VGM's newly unveiled Power of One Principles to help you get started. These are the value statements our team came up with at the end of our discovery process, and the response by our employee owners has been very positive so far. Notice that these statements are everything that our original code of



# Changing Workplace Culture Through Values Discovery continued

By Sara Laures, Chief People Officer, VGM Group, Inc.

conduct wasn't. Rather than a list of rules to follow "or else," each of these items is an ideal to live up to. Taken together, these eight statements easily convey who we are as a company and what sort of person will be successful as a member of our team.

*Make sure your entire leadership team is on the same page so you can work together to reinforce the values you've selected.*

## Leveraging Your Values

Once you've discovered your values, don't just slap them up on the wall and call it a day. It's a good first step, but it takes time and effort to create or change a workplace culture. If you have leaders or managers in your organization who weren't involved in the discovery process, bring them together and tell them what's happening and why. Make sure your entire leadership team is on the same page so you can work together to reinforce the values you've selected. Remember that effectively leveraging your values and using them to effect change has to start with your leadership. It will be up to you to articulate the values you've chosen and *live up to them* so that they don't ring hollow with the rest of your employees.

*The number one thing job seekers want to know is whether they will fit in with the people and culture of a company.*

Eventually, you'll want to let your entire team know what your selected values are, why you went to the trouble of discovering them, and what you want to accomplish using them as a roadmap. Clearly define each one and answer whatever questions staff members may have so that everyone has the opportunity to understand and internalize your

company's value statements. Once you've introduced your value statements to your team, you can start using them for a variety of useful purposes, including:

- **Talent Acquisition and Retention:** The number one thing people want to know when they're looking for work is whether they will fit in with the people and culture of a company. Putting your values up where job seekers can see them is a great way to let them know exactly what your company stands for and what type of people are successful there. Openly discuss your values with candidates and use them as a criteria when you make your hiring decisions. If you get this right, you'll attract better talent and make much better hiring decisions, which can effectively lower your turnover rates.
- **Leadership Development:** Clearly articulated values can be great tools for identifying and nurturing new leaders within your organization, as it takes all of the guesswork out of it. Who is consistently living up to your company's ideals and helping to develop others so that they can do the same? Having a set of core values in place can also be helpful to leaders by helping them recognize in-moment opportunities to express appreciation or offer coaching.
- **Creating Accountability:** You can still use your values to have critical conversations with struggling team members, but they change the entire dynamic. If someone on your team is missing the mark, you can have your discussion using a common language. This makes the discussion a lot less awkward. While you're talking, ask them to explain to you how they've been embracing the values of your organization, because you aren't seeing it. The dialogue this question invites can be a powerful learning opportunity for them and for you. It can also help you to determine what next steps need to be.



# Changing Workplace Culture Through Values Discovery continued

By Sara Laures, Chief People Officer, VGM Group, Inc.

*Our values shape our identity, and our identity determines what is meaningful to us.*

## We're Here for You

People want to work for organizations that share their values, because our values shape our identity, and our identity determines what is meaningful to us. Provide your employees with a place where they can feel like they belong, and they'll work hard every day without feeling like they work at all. Obviously, this article isn't comprehensive. If you have any questions about how you can go about discovering your values or using them to build or improve your workplace culture, be sure to get in touch with your Membership Account Manager (MAM) or Regional Account Manager (RAM) at VGM. They can put you in touch with me or another expert from our Human Capital team. We're passionate about people and organizational development, and we'd love to answer your questions or help you get started.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sara Laures** is Chief People Officer for VGM Group, Inc. She oversees people and culture strategy, human resources, talent acquisition, organizational development, facilities management, and manages corporate projects that support the success of VGM's multiple businesses and 1000+ employees. Beginning in 1998, her career has included multiple roles in VGM businesses, including a 14-year term as the Vice President of VGM Education. Sara has a bachelor's degree in health services administration from Upper Iowa University and is currently studying to become a certified professional coach through iPEC. She is an active member of Collaborative Gain HR Leadership Council and Cedar Valley SHRM. Sara also serves on the Cedar Valley Alliance's Economic Inclusion Partnership, is a board member at Inclusion Connection, and is an advisory board member at Gallagher Bluedorn Performing Arts Center. You can follow Sara on [LinkedIn](#), or reach out to her at [Sara.Laures@vgm.com](mailto:Sara.Laures@vgm.com).

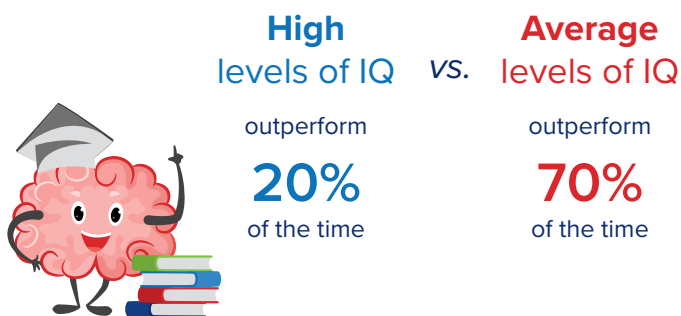


# What Is Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and Why Is It Important?

By Paul DiMarco, VP of Organizational Development, VGM Group, Inc.

Let's get right to a couple answers that should capture your attention. First, let's look at EQ's relationship to intelligence quotient (IQ) (we all recognize IQ as a measurement of intelligence). Studies have shown that people with high levels of IQ outperform those with average IQs just 20% of the time, while people with average IQs outperform those with high IQs 70% of the time. Why is that?

Studies have shown that people with...



How well you do in your life and career is determined by both IQ and EQ. IQ alone is not enough; EQ also matters. In fact, psychologists generally agree that among the ingredients for success, IQ counts for roughly 10% (at best 25%); the rest depends on everything else—including EQ.

*People with high EQs/high performers make more money—an average of \$29,000 per year more than people with low EQs.*

Next, let's look at earning potential to see why EQ is important. 90% of high performers in the workplace also have high EQ scores, while on the flipside, just 20% of low performers have high EQs. Naturally, people with high EQs/high performers make more money—an average of \$29,000 per year more than people with low EQs. Hopefully, these two examples have captured your attention as to why EQ is important. Now let's learn a bit more about what makes up EQ.

## There Are Five Basic Areas to Focus on to Understand EQ

- 1. Self-Awareness:** The ability to recognize an emotion as it “happens” is the key to your EQ. Developing self-awareness requires tuning in to your true feelings. If you evaluate your emotions, you can manage them.
- 2. Self-Regulation:** You often have little control over when you experience emotions. You can, however, have some say in how long an emotion will last by using techniques to alleviate negative emotions such as anger, anxiety, or depression. A popular saying goes something like, “Life is 10% of what happens and 90% of how you react.” Regulate how you react to what's happening, and your EQ will increase.
- 3. Motivation:** To motivate yourself for any achievement requires clear goals and a positive attitude. Although you may have a predisposition to either a positive or a negative attitude, you can, with effort and practice, learn to think more positively. If you catch negative thoughts as they occur, you can reframe them in more positive terms—which will help you achieve your goals.
- 4. Empathy:** The ability to recognize how people feel is important to success in your life and career. The more skillful you are at discerning the feelings behind others' signals, the better you can control the signals you send them.
- 5. Social Skills:** The development of good interpersonal skills is tantamount to success in your life and career. In today's always-connected world, everyone has immediate access to technical knowledge. Thus, “people skills” are even more important now because you must possess a high EQ to better understand, empathize, and negotiate with others in a global economy. People skills are starting to be called “real skills” as they are in such high demand.





## What Is Emotional Intelligence (EQ) and Why Is It Important? continued

By Paul DiMarco, VP of Organizational Development, VGM Group, Inc.

Let's take a quick look now at a different type of value gained (other than financial) by enhancing your EQ—this one from a management/leadership perspective. One of the main goals of a leader/manager is to develop a leadership mindset. What this means is that a leader is there to get results through their team. If they just focus on their activity and performance, their team will not perform at a high level—mostly because the leader is not focused on their needs and their development. A leader with an enhanced level of EQ will realize the true value they provide is in enhancing the capabilities of those around them.

*A leader with enhanced EQ will produce at a higher level because of their team.*

Putting others first and developing them will enable the team to feel valued and engaged. An engaged team will produce. An engaged team feels energized and will be more cohesive. Therefore, a leader with enhanced EQ will produce at a higher level because of their team. They will create a higher level of human-value which will in turn result in bottom line results for the organization. It's a win-win for everyone.

If you want to learn/read more about this, get the book *Emotional Intelligence 2.0* by Travis Bradberry. EQ is not one thing. Rather, it is how well we recognized what is happening around us, how our actions will continue to affect the situation, and the actions we put in place. The higher degree to which we can implement the five areas mentioned previously will determine our level of EQ. It's a lifelong process.



### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

#### Paul DiMarco

is VP of Organizational Development for VGM Group, Inc.

His focus is on defining the overall growth and development opportunities for all of VGM's employees across all industries. Paul's background in sales, sales management, and digital marketing provided a foundation for his roles at VGM. Prior to his current position, Paul was President of VGM Education, Vice President of VGM Marketing, and Operations Manager at VGM Forbin. A Mason City, Iowa, native and University of Minnesota Mankato graduate, Paul stays active with his community, church, and extended family. Paul and his wife, Lynda, have two sons, Mike who is 30 and Nick, who is 28. Connect with Paul via email at [Paul.DiMarco@vgm.com](mailto:Paul.DiMarco@vgm.com) or follow him on [LinkedIn](#).

# Conquer Your Mind and Get Out of Your Own Way

By Lindy Tentinger, Senior VP of Marketing, VGM & Associates

Everything in this world is fleeting. Everything. Life is hard—it literally kills us all at some point. Knowing the first two statements are true, how do you begin to live differently today? What are the things you can work on to be a better leader, at work and at home? I have been asking myself these questions for a long time now.

*What are the things you can work on to be a better leader, at work and at home?*

I have noticed some of my closest friends and colleagues in the same boat—rowing and rowing and seemingly getting nowhere. This could be with a business, job, parenting, relationship, you name it. As I’ve listened to stories and lived my own, I continue to search for ways to master myself because my own mind is the biggest part of the battle. How do I get out of my own way and achieve all the great things I want to achieve and leave this world a better place than I found it?

It sounds easy to change your mindset or conquer your thoughts. However, consistently being in the frame of mind to take yourself to the next level in life is something I am sure very few people accomplish in a lifetime. I tend to take bits and pieces of things I’ve read or seen and put together my own puzzle in terms of helping myself with anything. My mind challenge has been no different. Below are the things I’ve learned so far to start to truly live above the daily grind and constant worry about tomorrow:

## 1. Focus First on Staying True to Who You Are, Who You Want to Be, And What You Want to Do

It should be very easy to make decisions if you know your values and never deviate from who you are at your core. What are your non-negotiables? What do you stand for? What truth will you speak even if your voice shakes? This includes doing all the things you want to do while on this earth.

Quit talking, and pick one thing and do it. Just one. I made a list of every area of my life and every role that I play that is vital for keeping me true to myself. Tip: if you write it down it magically becomes easier to focus on and accomplish.

**Leadership Challenge:** Whether it’s fighting for a special cause, finally taking that trip to Europe, signing up for golf lessons, learning a new language, getting your kids through college, running a marathon, or writing that New York Times Bestseller, follow through on one of your “want to dos” this year.

## 2. Never Put the Key to Your Happiness in Someone Else’s Pocket

No one is responsible for your happiness but you. Relying on someone else for it is the surest way to be disappointed. Another lesson here is that no matter how hard you try, you cannot be the source of someone else’s happiness, either. If I had a superpower, though, that would be it!

**Leadership Challenge:** Answer this simple question for yourself—what makes you happy?

## 3. Smile and Laugh Until Your Face Hurts

“Let your smile change the world, but don’t let the world change your smile.” That is a sign I look at every morning by my mirror. I have a ginormous smile and an obnoxious giggle (or cackle I guess you could call it?) when you really get me going. At times I have been very self-conscious of both. I was told recently that my son shares my exact laugh. I never noticed that before, but one thing I did notice many times was how much his laugh makes me smile. So, I have decided to smile and laugh my own crazy laugh as much as I possibly can.

**Leadership Challenge:** Text at least one funny GIF to someone this week.



# Conquer Your Mind and Get Out of Your Own Way continued

By Lindy Tentinger, Senior VP of Marketing, VGM & Associates

## 4. 24 Hours at a Time—Nothing More

Life is granted to us in 24-hour chunks for a reason. You CAN get through the next 24 hours and then the next 24 hours and then the next. We are not guaranteed tomorrow. We are all one phone call, text message, or media blast away from tragedy that personally impacts us. This is why we have many “before this” and “after this” moments. These are the lines drawn in the sand when we experience something that changes things so profoundly that nothing is ever the same afterward. And, no one is immune to these things. We were reminded of this recently with the tragic helicopter crash that killed Kobe Bryant, his 13-year-old daughter, and seven other precious lives.

*Living for 24 hours at time allows us to enjoy surprises as they come.*

I have been working on the 24-hour rule for a good year—not that I haven’t always tried to live this way—but it has been one of my main focuses. I don’t do this perfectly every day. I do take a deep breath and remind myself of living for the day when my mind starts to get too far ahead of itself. Living for 24 hours at time allows us to enjoy surprises as they come. Living for the day helps with worry. Worrying only makes us suffer multiple times instead of just when it happens—if it even ever does.

**Leadership Challenge:** If you notice your mind start to creep beyond this very moment, keep re-directing it back to the present until it stops.

## 5. EVERYTHING in Moderation

If you put the word “too” in front of anything regularly, it’s not good. Too much or too little. Stick to the 80/20 rule. Not just with food and exercise, but with everything. You can literally under- or over-indulge on anything. Give yourself a break and then get right back on track.

**Leadership Challenge:** Identify one thing in your life with “too” in front of it.

*Don’t be afraid of the conversations you are having. Be afraid of the conversations you are not having.*

## 6. Everyone You Meet Knows Something You Don’t

You will benefit from having a conversation you didn’t want to have or shy away from having. A quote that sticks out to me is “don’t be afraid of the conversations you are having. Be afraid of the conversations you are not having.” How true is this? It applies to all areas from the stranger sitting next to you on the airplane to your kids to your significant other to your co-workers. Put yourself out there, smile and ask someone a simple question in order to learn a whole lot. You never know who you will meet or what it will lead to.

**Leadership Challenge:** Initiate a conversation with a stranger in the next month. Jot down what you learned.

*We assume that others think the exact same way we do. It is human nature. However, that is not true.*



# Conquer Your Mind and Get Out of Your Own Way continued

By Lindy Tentinger, Senior VP of Marketing, VGM & Associates

## 7. Have a Forgiving Heart

Holding grudges literally kills our soul. Try hard to put yourself in someone else's shoes when you find it is difficult to give grace and forgive. No one is perfect. We sometimes unintentionally hurt others (sometimes intentionally too, I know) and, unfortunately, often hurt the ones we love the most. Give the benefit of the doubt. Most of the time it is a lack of communication or simply different perspectives. We assume that others think the exact same way we do. It is human nature. However, that is not true. The biggest distance between two people is misunderstanding. Love unconditionally. Be the nicest to those who aren't the nicest to you. This will set you free.

**Leadership Challenge:** Make a list of who you need to forgive. Work on the list every chance you get.

## 8. If You See Something in Someone, SAY IT

There is nothing worse than suppressed thoughts and feelings. You also just might make someone's day when you express yourself with compliments or appreciation. I read this every single day to remind myself:

- Missing someone? CALL
- Want to see someone? INVITE
- Want to be understood? EXPLAIN
- Have a question? ASK
- Don't like something? SAY IT
- Like something? STATE IT
- Want something? ASK FOR IT
- Love someone? TELL THEM

**Leadership Challenge:** SAY IT to one person this week.

Fair warning: the list I made is not an easy list to follow. I do better at some over others depending on the day, but I am constantly trying to live my life this way.

However, just one small win every day will add up to a big difference. A difference where your mind is clear to notice and enjoy all the little things or surprises. A difference where you worry less and tackle the hard stuff as it comes, instead of the constant what ifs. A difference where you dismiss how you want things to be and just let them be as they are. A difference where you make one heck of a difference in the people's lives you touch day in and day out. A difference that distinguishes a leader from the pack. That leader is you.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

#### Lindy Tentinger

is Senior VP of Marketing for VGM & Associates. Prior to joining VGM,

Lindy worked at a global business process outsourcing (BPO) company. She built the company's marketing department from the ground up and led both sales and marketing through a digital transformation and a re-branding/positioning launch. Her marketing leadership helped gain global exposure and year-over-year revenue growth for the company's multiple brands. She is well-versed in many industry verticals including healthcare, financial services, utilities, government, telecommunications, and higher education. Lindy also has vast experience managing and developing processes and systems for request for proposals (RFPs). Lindy holds a Bachelor of Arts in electronic media from Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa. She obtained her MBA with a marketing concentration from Bellevue University in 2013. Connect with Lindy via email at [Lindy.Tentinger@vgm.com](mailto:Lindy.Tentinger@vgm.com) or follow her on [LinkedIn](#).



# Meet Rachel Duda, Millennial Leader

## RACHEL DUDA

*Supervisor & Business Development Liaison*  
Louis & Clark Medical Supply and The Pink Mermaid

I was a senior in college when I entered the industry as an intern who didn't even know that her grandma's Golden Technologies scooter was considered "DME." Heck, I didn't even know what the term "DME" meant. Three years later, here I am living and breathing it day in and day out.

My work family is what keeps me in this industry. Working for a small company fits my lifestyle and core values, and the customers I work with are my true purpose. Patients do not want to come into the DME world—it is a necessity. Doing what we can to make them smile is what brings me joy in my workday. The customers who confide in you—and I think I can speak for most DME folks—make it all worthwhile. We know their products, we know their personalities, and it makes us untouchable against the internet.

Millennials stand out in healthcare especially in our sector of the industry. It's an industry that can't be learned overnight or even in a year. There is a wealth of product, insurance, and clinical knowledge to be learned before feeling completely comfortable answering customer questions. That's why a willingness to learn and challenge oneself are two key factors for managers to consider when hiring anyone, but especially millennials.

For any millennials working to be leaders in the industry, my advice would be to never sell yourself short because of your age. There is always room for growth and proving yourself. Saying "yes" is half the battle but earning that respect by trying your best and asking questions is worth it in the end—because this is *your* beginning.

I believe that challenging myself personally motivates me to challenge myself professionally too. I love running half and full marathons, so it seems fitting that I accepted my new position after I ran the Hartford Marathon. Supervising and marketing for a medical supply company is comparable to running a marathon. You put in the training and hard work knowing they'll pay off. It takes time, effort, and emotions—but you feel unstoppable once you reach your goals. And you just want to keep taking steps to exceed those goals.

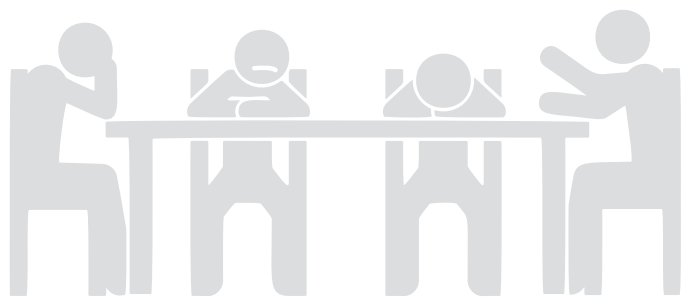


# Careful Preparation Can Make Meetings Meaningful

By Sarah Conger, VP of Events & Corporate Projects, VGM Group, Inc.

Let's face it—no one in corporate America wishes they had more meetings on their calendar. Studies and polls consistently show that most business professionals see the meetings they attend every week as a waste of their time and that many bring their laptops with them so that they can try to get some actual work done while they're happening. That's a huge problem for your business if you consider the combined hourly wage of everyone attending meetings that ultimately serve no purpose. It gets worse when you factor in the opportunity cost to your business that comes with pulling people away from their desks for an hour at a time for no real benefit to your company.

The average person spends  
**31 HOURS** a month  
in *unproductive* meetings



An average annual cost  
to American companies of  
**\$37 BILLION**

It's estimated that the average person spends 31 hours a month in unproductive meetings, and that the average annual cost to American companies is

a whopping \$37 billion. Needless to say, you don't want your organization contributing to that statistic. Fortunately, it doesn't take much to make meetings a valuable and productive use of time. Planning ahead and imposing some structure can help you and your coworkers get the most out of meetings.

## Initial Questions

Being forced to attend meetings that are perceived as a waste of time can take a huge toll on the morale of your employees. This leads to lower engagement with their work, which ultimately leads to poorer job performance. It also contributes to higher turnover rates.

Science proves that most people are *really* bad at splitting their attention, which means that the work getting done in meetings by people who should be focusing on and contributing to the discussion probably isn't their best. That includes any communication they might have with your customers and business partners.

*Unproductive meetings have the potential to be an enormous drain on your company's most important resources.*

All of this goes to show one very simple truth—unproductive meetings have the potential to be an enormous drain on your company's most important resources. If you want to get the most out of your meetings, you need to start by asking two fundamental questions.

## The First Question: Is This Meeting Necessary?

If you want meetings at your company to be more meaningful, you need to embrace the idea that most of the time that you spend on one should happen before anyone ever walks through the conference room door.



# Careful Preparation Can Make Meetings Meaningful continued

By Sarah Conger, VP of Events & Corporate Projects, VGM Group, Inc.

Before you even think about sending out those Outlook invitations to your attendees, you need to ask yourself: is this meeting *really* necessary? It's okay to sit with the question for a bit. If your only purpose is to inform attendees of something, and you don't need to get their input, or if you just have a question that you'd like to ask that has a relatively straightforward answer, an email or instant message might be more appropriate. People generally read faster than they speak, and they're more focused while they do it.

*Meetings should be reserved for when a dialogue is needed between specific individuals to achieve a concrete purpose.*

Meetings should be reserved for situations where an actual *dialogue* needs to happen between *specific individuals* to achieve a *concrete purpose* or objective. If the meeting you're about to call doesn't meet these criteria, then you may want to reconsider your approach.

## The Second Question: Who Needs to Attend?

Once you've determined that a meeting is necessary, it's time to ask yourself who needs to be there. **Be exclusive.** Several of America's largest and most successful companies consider limiting the number of attendees at meetings to be a critical factor in making them productive.

*Two Pizza Rule: There should never be more people in a meeting than what two large pizzas can feed... preferably with leftovers.*

Google is famous for allowing no more than 10 people to attend any meeting for any reason. Amazon uses the "Two Pizza Rule," which states that there should never be more people in a meeting than what two large pizzas can feed...preferably with some leftovers.

Your invitees should be people who have enough background information to contribute to a vigorous discussion on your meeting topic *and* have the authority to make a decision or create and assign responsibility for action steps before the meeting ends. Leave everyone else at their desks. Inclusion is necessary in any workplace, and the dynamics of every office are different, but there are plenty of ways to keep the rest of your staff informed and involved without bringing them into meetings unnecessarily.

*The average person can maintain their focus during a meeting for about 10 to 18 minutes.*

## Get Ready

Once you've answered your two initial questions, the following steps will help you prepare for a successful meeting:

- 1. Decide how much time you need.** Research suggests that people will generally fill whatever time they're given for a meeting and that most of what they fill it with isn't very productive. Be conservative. A good default meeting time is around 15 minutes. Yes, you read that right. Studies routinely show that the average person can maintain their focus during a meeting for about 10 to 18 minutes before checking out. This is why companies like Yahoo and Google set their default meeting times to 15 minutes, expanding as necessary if the situation calls for it.

There is a biological basis for this. When the brain processes new information, it needs a lot of glucose and oxygen to do it. This is why long meetings are so physically exhausting even though people are sitting in chairs. As fatigue sets in and blood sugar levels drop, people are generally far less attentive. They may even fall asleep.



# Careful Preparation Can Make Meetings Meaningful continued

By Sarah Conger, VP of Events & Corporate Projects, VGM Group, Inc.

- 2. Prepare an agenda and provide it with the invitation.** Every meeting should be planned down to the last minute. This accomplishes two things. First, it allows attendees to prepare for the discussion ahead of time, and second, it moves the conversation and keeps people on task once the meeting has begun. Your agenda shouldn't be set in stone, as things will likely shift a bit while the meeting is in progress, but having an agenda makes it clear what needs to be discussed...and what doesn't. Having an agenda will help you and your attendees to stay on topic.

Invite attendees to reach out to you with possible additions or adjustments to the agenda, but set a cutoff date for this and stick to it. People should not be coming to the meeting with new items to add, especially if they don't directly relate to the topic of discussion. This is another reason to keep your meeting times short. As other items come up, you can schedule separate meetings without bogging anyone down for too long.

- 3. Provide context for your meeting.** If you're using software like Microsoft Outlook, make sure that you provide a title and a description when you schedule your meetings. When an invitee is considering whether they need to accept your meeting invitation, there should be no question in their minds about what will be discussed. Choose a title that makes the meeting topic obvious.

*Your employees should be encouraged to manage their time wisely, which includes declining meetings or proposing new dates/times.*

A good description is brief, to the point, and provides enough context for a recipient to determine how they should prioritize your meeting invitation compared to whatever else might be on their calendar. Your employees should be encouraged to manage their time wisely, which includes declining meetings or proposing new dates/times as needed.

- 4. Provide whatever resources or background information your participants will need ahead of time.** Rather than spending the first part of your meeting bringing participants up to speed, give them what they need to know well in advance, along with the expectation that they will familiarize themselves with it before showing up. Not only will this drastically reduce your meeting duration, but it will provide attendees with time to sit with the information and come up with solid questions or discussion points.

- 5. Consider your meeting space.** If you're only getting a few people together, don't book the executive boardroom that seats 30. People tend to spread out to fill whatever space they're given. Too much space will allow their attention to drift. People will be far more engaged and attentive if they're sitting near one another and making eye contact while speaking.

*There is nothing less productive than listening to someone read bullet points that could have been provided before the meeting.*

- 6. Ban technology.** Seriously. There is a reason why the largest and most successful companies in America are banning the use of PowerPoint, laptops, and cellphones during meetings. There is nothing less productive than listening to someone read bullet points that could have been provided prior to the meeting or allowing people to respond to emails or texts while they're supposed to be actively engaged in discussion.

Tell your invitees to leave their devices at their desks, and have anyone who forgets to check them at the door. Save the TV screens in the meeting room for presentations. Leave them off for meetings. People with access to screens during meetings have difficulty understanding complex ideas and a harder time remembering what was discussed.





# Careful Preparation Can Make Meetings Meaningful continued

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## Final Thoughts

As a leader, it is important to set the tone for meetings so that your colleagues and business partners can know what to expect and have more respectful and productive discussions. Before anyone gets an invitation, you should carefully consider if it is beneficial to hold one, and if so, know who will profit most from being there. After these decisions are made, the focus should be on creating a constructive discussion within a set time parameter and closing in a manner that keeps everyone on the same page and confident about the next steps.

The content from this article is part of a larger series of courses offered by VGM Education. For more information about the complete 12-course Leadership Mastery Program designed for both new and seasoned leaders, contact VGM Education at **866-227-8171** or [vgmeducation@vgm.com](mailto:vgmeducation@vgm.com).

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## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Sarah Conger** is the VP of Events & Corporate Projects for the VGM Group where she has spent nearly a decade juggling the organization, planning, and execution of multiple events and projects while managing her team of fun-loving event coordinators. To meet the demands of her busy schedule, Sarah has learned to make every second of her workday count. Her attention to detail, relentless positivity, and unflinching professionalism ensure that every corporate event is an unforgettable experience for VGM and its thousands of members, customers, and employee owners across the country. These same qualities were recognized in 2017 with the bestowment of one of VGM's coveted Employee Owner of the Year Awards, Behind the Scenes Wonder. When she's not in the office, Sarah enjoys spending time with her son, Mason, and cheering on the Iowa Hawkeyes. You can connect with Sarah via email at [Sarah.Conger@vgm.com](mailto:Sarah.Conger@vgm.com) or follow her on [LinkedIn](#).

By Jeff Bowman, VP, HME Sales, McKesson Medical-Surgical, Inc.

There are many ways to imagine what great leadership looks like, but at its core, there are two qualities that stand out. First is the ability to create and communicate a vision. The second is the ability to inspire others to get them to rally around a specific purpose. In business, some mistakenly think that to be a leader, you must have a title. I don't buy that. Here's the secret—*each of us has the ability to lead*—whether you're a CEO, salesperson, delivery driver, or even an industry. Leadership comes in many forms, but make no mistake, it must be developed.

*Each of us has the ability to lead—whether you're a CEO, salesperson, delivery driver, or even an industry.*

At McKesson, we have tremendous development programs for leadership. I've gotten to experience many of these, and as part of the programs, I heard from individuals like Marshall Goldsmith, Patrick Lencioni, celebrities like Hank Haney, and leaders of many large organizations. Here's what I learned. You, as a leader, are developed over time. It's not something you are born with. This means you have to invest to develop your leadership abilities.

The development of your team is essential to growth, and it requires your leadership. It must be a conscious decision and commitment with a specific plan and actionable goals behind it. The more actionable the goals, the better chance that individual or team will grow and help your company achieve its full potential.

*Part of leadership is knowing when it's time to let others lead so they grow, and in some cases, make mistakes.*

Another important part of leadership is to know when to get in the foxhole with your team and know when it's time to let others lead so they grow, and in some

cases, make mistakes. It's okay to make mistakes. It's how we deal with the mistake that matters.

To develop my own leadership skills, here's what I think about to make sure I'm "walking the talk" and fulfilling the commitment McKesson has in me, and equally as important, how I'm using these skills to help McKesson while also helping the industry.

- Helping others innovate
- Inspiring others to try
- Motivating others to do better
- Sharing vision and goals
- Collaborating with others

*Great culture beats great strategy any day.*

History tells us when an organization or industry has an effective leader, they become a catalyst for change, creating the right culture with the right mission. When these conditions happen, driven by great leadership, success inevitably follows. As many say, great culture beats great strategy any day.

Creating a strong culture is important and vital to growth. To help achieve this, focus on your strengths—not weaknesses. So many times, people focus on weaknesses versus what they have to use. At McKesson, we use ILEAD (Inspire, Leverage, Execute, Advance, Develop)—which are our guiding leadership principles—to create a culture that fuels our company for growth. McKesson is a marketplace leader because our culture allows for innovation, taking chances, and recognizing success. It's pretty simple really.

There are also countless leadership examples that exist throughout the DMEPOS industry. In some cases,

## ● ● ● Leadership continued

*By Jeff Bowman, VP, HME Sales, McKesson Medical-Surgical, Inc.*

Leaders are working to advance the industry through better healthcare policy at both the state and federal levels. AAHomecare and VGM are organizations that have shown great leadership in this area over many years. In other cases, it's the provider that quietly builds confidence in their employees through their tireless coaching and mentoring that ultimately equals great service to their patients.

*Set a vision, inspire others around a purpose, develop your team, and go after it with all your heart.*

True leadership comes from each of us. Set a vision, inspire others around a purpose, develop your team, and go after it with all your heart. If you do that, lives can be changed. You have the chance to lead. Make the commitment today if you haven't already—and go for it. It's worth it.

### ABOUT THE AUTHOR

**Jeff Bowman** is VP of HME Sales for McKesson Medical-Surgical. Bowman is responsible for setting the HME growth strategy, deploying the sales resources, and aligning McKesson Medical-Surgical's expansive capabilities to the HME market. Prior to joining McKesson in 2004, he helped to open several healthcare businesses in the Nashville area. These businesses primarily focused on reimbursement services, medical supply distribution, and clinical services for the skilled nursing facility and homecare markets.



# MCKESSON

# Employee and Employer Disparity in Appreciation

By Miriam Lieber, President, Lieber Consulting

In Chip and Dan Heath's book, *The Power of Moments*, they write about a simple statement of recognition being the pivotal reason for someone's career growth or even the turn in someone's life. All of us can remember a moment in our lives that mattered more than others. It might've been when we got singled out for our great voice, a strategic move on the soccer field, or how we came to the aid of a friend. Those seemingly small moments turn into the most meaningful matters in our memories. The same is true at work.

*The top reason people leave their jobs is a lack of praise and recognition.*

According to research, the Heaths write, "More than 80% of supervisors claim they frequently express appreciation to their subordinates, while less than 20% of the employees report that their supervisors express appreciation more than occasionally." This gap's consequence is what causes people to leave their jobs. Specifically, it states, "One survey found that the top reason people leave their jobs is a lack of praise and recognition."

## Specificity Goes a Long Way

Knowing that people want to be recognized for their hard work, it is important to remember not to make it general when praising someone; this can come off as shallow and insincere. Rather, make praise genuine, authentic, and personal. State specifically why you liked what the person did, not just that the act was good. Commend them for a job well done and why.

For example, when someone collects more money than you expected, saying "good job" is fine. However, if you add that exceeding the goal by X percent or X dollars in X amount of time—this is more than 20% better than expected and the largest number of dollars collected this year—it sounds more meaningful.

*What really matters in the workplace is helping employees feel appreciated.*

Genuine praise is not only appreciated, but it is of paramount importance to employees. According to new research by Harvard Business School Assistant Professor Ashley V. Whillans, "What really matters in the workplace is helping employees feel appreciated." For me personally, in my consulting engagements and coaching career, I find that working with new leaders on motivation and praise for their employees is a focal point in many of our discussions. I also work to model the same behavior when I see their progress, highlighting what about our discussion I really like and where they are making progress as leaders.

*With motivation comes hard work and positive energy that translates to high achievement.*

It is always true that when people feel appreciated, they feel inspired and driven. With motivation comes hard work and positive energy that typically translates to high achievement. After all, success breeds success. This becomes contagious and permeates the organization.

*With an organically positive environment, people's strengths become the focus and they work to continue strengthening them.*

On the other hand, when it is not present in an employee, it becomes a glaring deficiency. That person either rises to the occasion and improves their productivity and attitude or they leave the company. With an organically positive environment,

# ● ● ● Employee and Employer Disparity in Appreciation

By Miriam Lieber, President, Lieber Consulting

people's strengths become the focus and they work to continue strengthening them. As proof, the Aon 2018 Trends in Global Employee Engagement survey, conducted in 1,000 companies employing 8 million people globally, showed rewards and recognition as “the strongest driver of engagement, and that recognition for contributions (apart from pay and benefits) was the key factor in the rewards and recognition component.”

*You should remind your employees daily that you recognize their contributions... It is those small moments that matter most.*

The message here is that you should remind your employees daily that you recognize their contributions. If it's an alarm you set or a scheduled reminder for this to become a habit, that is fine. By recognizing staff, they will be engaged and more motivated. Who knows, you might make someone's day, week, year, and career—after all, it is those small moments that matter most.

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR



**Miriam Lieber** is an independent consultant and trainer specializing in homecare reimbursement and operations management. Her extensive experience with Medicare and other third-party payers has brought her national recognition in the homecare industry. With over 25 years of experience in the homecare field, Miriam is a featured author of many articles in the areas of operations management and leadership. She is also a nationally known speaker for many homecare trade associations. In her consulting practice, Ms. Lieber's clientele includes, home healthcare companies, managed care organizations, hospitals, wholesalers, pharmacists, and manufacturers. She is known to have practical approaches to complex reimbursement matters and assists her clients with the nuts and bolts of running a profitable business.

