

## Making Knowledge Meaningful

**By Denise Hammel-Jones MSN, RN, BC  
Clinical Management Consultant**

The proliferation of technology in the healthcare industry over the last decade has never been more evident. With this, there has also been an increase in consulting firms looking to either assume a larger stake or enter the healthcare arena in an effort to profit from this trend. Recently, the economic downturn has created an environment where healthcare organizations' capital to spend on technology initiatives is dwindling. With fewer dollars to spend on technology and the expertise to implement technology, the need for healthcare consulting firms to have a competitive edge is critical. Consulting firms will need to demonstrate how they can implement technology in an efficient, effective manner that minimizes disruption to an organization. In order for a consulting firm to accomplish this, they must possess staff with the knowledge and skills superior to their competitors.

Staff with competitive edge knowledge will make Greencastle the "go-to" firm for technology, process improvement and value maximization initiatives. As more opportunities evolve, Greencastle consultants will have greater possibilities to work on diverse and more complex projects. The ideal here is cyclical, when Greencastle as a company benefits, so too do Greencastle consultants. To explain further, as Greencastle staff acquires more knowledge and skills to move the firm forward, Greencastle benefits by receiving more complex opportunities to work on and achieves Greencastle's business goals. This in turn allows Greencastle consultants to work in an environment that is rewarding, challenging and provides room for self-development; it helps to fulfill the value propositions back to each consultant.

The concept of each employee embracing knowledge as means to make their organization and in return the individual more success and satisfied is referred to as a learning organization. The book "The Knowledge Enabled Organization" states that "successful companies encourage, by enabling and facilitating the exchange of knowledge and ideas and by empowering employees to try new ideas to improve their own and the company's performance." This is a really key concept in noting the difference between a true learning organization and a company that just offers training. Knowledge-enabled or learning organizations realize that all learning, whether it occurs from internal and external sources, is tied directly to business goal achievement.

Greencastle has demonstrated its commitment to learning for years through "GAC Day", the once a month training initiative focused on maintaining a baseline knowledge throughout the organization and an opportunity to share the experiences each consultant has within their client site with each other. The GAC

Day method of knowledge delivery addresses the fundamentals of how people learn; through other people. But there are also less deliberate methods of acquiring knowledge that GAC'ers engage in on a regular basis, such as through daily experiences, and watching a senior consultant performs their work activities. We at GAC know the second point discussed here as "showing what right looks like." Although we have this model in place, to move GAC forward the current model of information delivery is not enough. Each of us must alter our way of thinking about knowledge development in order for GAC to become a learning organization. Greencastle doesn't have to completely alter their method of delivering knowledge but rather drive towards changing how its consultants currently view, value and convey knowledge.

Knowledge only becomes meaningful when it is personalized in its delivery and appeals to the interest and values of the receiver. My knowledge values are not likely to be the same as another Greencastle consultant. The method of receiving and incorporating information will not be similar to someone else either. Those responsible for delivering knowledge within Greencastle will need to tap into what consultant's value and modify their approach/content to fit this. Likewise, consultants need to examine their own personal learning objectives to assess how to maximize these for their own personal benefit and the benefit of the firm. Not only is there the realization that knowledge acquisition and knowledge value is very personal, what is important and how it is received varies generation by generation. Within Greencastle we have representation from Baby Boomers to Generation Y. As this learning organization model evolves it will need to incorporate learning strategies that go beyond basic information delivery but rather appeal to a cross-section of workers; strategies that understand what motivates each generational group.

In order to move GAC closer towards becoming a learning organization it's essential for consultants to eliminate potential barriers that inhibit a learning organization from fully developing. Barriers to the development of knowledge are related to the failure to apply information to the employer's work or a failure to recognize and share tacit knowledge. Each GAC'er needs to value information they possess

about their clients or current/past experiences. This information should be shared internally and externally when appropriate as it enhances the breadth of knowledge among all GAC employees and demonstrates the value of each GAC consultant back to the client. Shared knowledge, including lessons learned from the client experience benefit consultants and Greencastle at large. Finally, if you don't take time to learn, you will have gained experience but not necessarily the knowledge to truly understand and apply the experience. Learning a new skill or piece of information at GAC is only the start of knowledge, incorporating that information into practice is a journey.

For many successful consulting companies, internal knowledge becomes a commodity which can be bought. This is often what accelerates company growth; when employees can take their knowledge product- ionize it, then knowledge is marketable. Marketable knowledge falls into three categories according to the authors of "The Knowledge-Enabled Organization." The three categories are: knowledge about the company, knowledge about customers and knowledge about the company's business processes. The combination of these areas of knowledge becomes the intellectual assets of the organization. We understand that part of our role as consultants is to sell our services to the current client site or to other prospective clients. Part of "sales" involves the understanding that in addition to "services", we offer a knowledge base that may not exist within the client. Again, employee knowledge development is commodity which can be purchased. Looking back to the opening thoughts within this article, the competition for knowledge/expertise is becoming tough; we will have no choice but to excel at this.

As GAC moves forward and undertakes many of the tasks outlined in the BSC initiatives, the focus must remain steadfast on two clear goals: to accelerate the growth of the company and distinguish Greencastle as a leader in the consulting industry. The second goal is for Greencastle to demonstrate its value proposition to its employees. Both can be accomplished through re-aligning the values Greencastle employees have regarding knowledge and how the acquisition and development of knowledge help promote employee and company growth.



627 Swedesford Road  
Malvern, PA 19355

Tel: 610-640-9958

[www.GreencastleConsulting.com](http://www.GreencastleConsulting.com)

© Greencastle Associates Consulting, LLC.