

Leadership Strategies

The Tools to Help You Lead Effectively

Vol. 5, No. 12 December 2002

■ COMMUNICATION

Leading your 'geek' contingent

Leading people whose work is fundamentally creative presents a special leadership challenge. Knowledge workers—so-called “geeks”—are less motivated by money, position or power. But give a geek an exciting, challenging project, and his motivation soars.

In addition, knowledge workers notoriously reject official hierarchies and tend to build their own hierarchies based on two values they hold dear: knowledge and meritocracy. What's more, the unofficial leader of your knowledge group may not hold decision-making power but definitely wields great influence on the opinions of everyone else within the group.

Once you understand those relationships, leading knowledge workers effectively becomes much easier. First, remember that your knowledge

group's unofficial leaders have earned the respect of their peers for good reasons, including their technical brilliance. Seek their advice and suggestions. Their insights can improve your decisions. Moreover, their opinions—

either in support of or against your agenda—hold sway over the rest of the group.

Don't pull rank to force knowledge workers to follow your agenda. *Remember:* Official titles and position hold little importance or meaning to them.

Knowledge workers respond much better to explanations and are willing to follow an agenda that makes sense to them. Offer solid reasons for what you want them to do and they are much more likely to follow you.

Give a geek an exciting, challenging project and his motivation will soar.

— Adapted from *Leading Geeks*, Paul Glen, Jossey-Bass.