Creating and Sustaining Hot Spots of Innovation

An interactive presentation and/or workshop offered by

Steve Denning

This interactive presentation or workshop shows participants: how do you reverse engineer hot spots of innovation, high performance teams, or any group of human beings characterized by high energy and extraordinary innovation?

Steve Denning's new presentation/workshop provides participants with:

- a general theory of human groups, whether workgroups, teams, communities, networks and organizations (as well as families and marriages)
- an understanding of why traditional approaches to building teams can't generate hot spots of innovation or high performance teams.
- a simple mnemonic that can be used to diagnose what is wrong with a group, and
- a step-by-step guide to creating and sustaining a hot spot of innovation or a high performance team.

During the workshop, participants will work on how to go about energizing a group and sparking its creativity.

By the end of a full workshop, participants will:

- be inspired, as they realize that they now know how to energize—or re-energize—any human group;
- have an action plan as how to re-energize and vitalize a group in their experience;
- have had hands-on practice during the workshop in implementing their plan.

What is a hot spot of innovation or high performance team?

In a sense, we all know what a hot spot of innovation or a high performance team is.

We can all think of a time in our lives, a time when we were in some grouping—a team, a workgroup, a school, a community, a network, a family, a marriage—when everyone was pulling together, when everyone was on the same wave length, when everyone had the same goal, when everyone was energized and enthusiastic, when people were willing to help each other and go the extra mile, whether they personally got something out of it or not, when the group seemed able to achieve things that went way beyond what anyone expected. It was a time when we felt energized and vibrantly alive. The group was buzzing with ideas and creativity. We experienced the joy and excitement of generating something genuinely new.

Sadly, for most of us, those experiences have been rare. Most of our experiences have been in groupings where not everyone was pulling together, where people were undermining each other, and pursuing their own agendas, and only willing to help the group to the extent that they could see what was in it for them. Those groups often got things done, and even did them very well, but it wasn't nearly as energizing or exciting or thrilling as the former kind of experience.

So we all intuitively know what a hot spot of innovation is and what it isn't. In fact, a hot spot is something we don't easily forget. One characteristic of being in such a group is that the experience so marks people involved in it that they often spend years dreaming of

recreating it. It marks them for life. And they tend to want to have reunions with the other people who were with them at the time, and reminisce about how great it was, and discuss what has been lost because the group no longer exists or no longer functions like that, and so on. Some of them say how frustrated they feel because they have never been able to experience anything like it ever again.

Why are hot spots and high performance teams so rare?

If hot spots and high performance teams are so wonderful, why are they are so rare? Fundamentally, it's because people don't know how to create or sustain them.

Many books have been written about these high performance groups using various labels. Some writers call them called them "*hot spots*" like Lynda Gratton in her book of that name. Some writers call them "*high performance teams*" like Richard Hackman in *Leading Teams* or Jon Katzenbach and Douglas Smith in *The Wisdom of Teams*. Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi calls it the experience of "flow" in his book, *Flow: The Psychology of Optimal Experience*.

But there is a missing chapter in all those books: how do you create and sustain hot spots of innovation or high performance teams? The books are very good in describing the phenomenon, but not very good at saying how you generate or sustain them.

Lynda Gratton in her book, *Hot Spots*, does talk about it, but she discusses it in terms of managerial actions, like selecting and mentoring and providing incentives. And yet we know that managerial actions of this kind can never by themselves generate the kind of passion that characterize hot spots or high performance teams. So that can't really be the answer.

Books on teams are mainly talking about mechanical or structural measures. Appoint the right team members. Have doable goals. Have the right team size. Put in place feedback mechanisms. And so on. These actions are all well and good. They are *necessary* conditions for generating effective teams. But they are not *sufficient*. They don't by themselves generate high-performance teams. They don't generate the passion that characterizes group that a hot spot.

This leads writers like Richard Hackman or Jon Katzenbach to conclude that it simply isn't possible to generate high performance teams. They suggest that high performance teams are a matter of "luck" or "chemistry". You can do your best to create the right conditions for strong teams, but in the end, you can't "make" a team become a high performance team. You cross your fingers and you just hope for the best.

How Narrative Generates Hot Spots & High Performance Teams

What those writers have been overlooking is the power of narrative to generate passion and inspire enthusiasm for change. Building on his award-winning book, *The Secret Language of Leadership* (Jossey-Bass, 2007), Steve Denning's new work diagnoses the crucial components of a hot spot or high performance team, and shows the specific narrative patterns that are suitable for generating its components.

His new work provides the missing chapter in those earlier books. It explains how to create and sustain hot spots of innovation, high performance teams, groups experiencing flow, groups with extraordinary energy and innovation, through the creative use of narrative. It shows: how do you get people working together in this spirit of highly energized collaboration?

In his award-winning book, *The Secret Language of Leadership*, (Jossey-Bass, 2007) Steve Denning addressed a central challenge by leaders. He revealed the hidden patterns of

narrative that successful leaders use to **spark enduring enthusiasm for change**. He showed why conventional methods of communication were not only ineffective but counterproductive with today's difficult audiences and what leaders could do win over even difficult, cynical or skeptical audiences.

In his new work, Steve Denning sheds light on a related leadership challenge. How do you **get people working together with enduring enthusiasm,** even when there is no change involved? How do you create not just teams but high-performance teams that consistently outperform their counterparts? How do create communities, networks and movements that bring people together and catalyze active collaboration between people in today's global workplace, where people are different in terms of ethnicity, nationality, religion, lifestyle, age group, and geographical location. How do you catalyze collaboration among people when they have different views about virtually everything? How do you re-energize a tired brand and infuse it with new life and energy?

Who is this for?

This presentation or workshop is for:

- Managers, firms, workgroups, teams, communities or networks that are working well together, but want to lift their game, get to the next level and **create genuine hot spots of innovation and high performance teams**.

- Managers, firms, workgroups, teams, communities or networks that want to **energize or re-energize their brand**.

- Managers, firms, workgroups, teams, communities or networks that are planning future collaboration and want to **get their group off to a flying start**.

- Managers, firms, workgroups, teams, communities or networks that have lost their edge and **want to rekindle the passion that underlies great performance**.

Available presentations and workshops

For those who want a quick overview of the subject, a **one-hour keynote presentation** is available that explains the principles involved.

For those who want a rapid introduction to what's involved, a **two-hour workshop** is available that gives participants some initial interactive hands-on experience of some of the elements of what's involved, as well as the general principles.

For participants who want to master the basics and who have already mastered the elements of springboard storytelling in one of Steve Denning's workshops, **a half-day workshop** is sufficient to inform them of what is involved and give them hands-on experience of all the elements.

For participants who want to master the basics of creating hot spots and who have not yet mastered the elements of springboard storytelling, **a one-day workshop** is recommended. In the morning, participants would master the elements of springboard storytelling. In the afternoon, they would complete the half-day workshop on creating and sustaining hotspots.

The content of the presentation or workshop

The presentation or workshop introduces participants to the P-R-E-V-A-I-L mnemonic which encapsulates the main components of hot spots and high performance teams:

P – **P**urpose
R – **R**esources
E – **E**ngage
V – **V**italize
A – **A**utonomy
I – **I**nputs from beyond the group
L – **L**istening to the group's Rhythm

To spell this out in a little more detail:

P – <u>Purpose</u> that is noble, worthwhile, large.

A hot spot or high performance team needs a goal that is not merely about instrumental benefits like meeting the first quarter targets. It needs a goal that is worthwhile, even noble.

The goal may be implicit or explicit, but it must exist.

R – <u>Resources</u> that are adequate to the purpose

Time, that is appropriate for the purpose

Money, sufficient to meet needs of the group

Space, real or virtual, that provides a kind of home to the group

People with appropriate skills

Energy – each group must have enough sovereign, magician, hero and nurturer energy
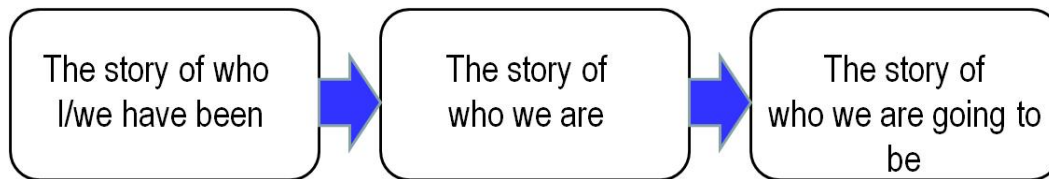
E – One or more members must <u>Engage</u> to make the purpose happen<u>.</u>

At least one member of the group must explicitly commit to making the purpose actually happen.

V – One or more members must <u>Vitalize</u> the group.

To vitalize the group:

a. It is necessary to understand the subjective world of the members who need to energized: why haven't they committed to the purpose?

b. It is necessary to understand what are their (hidden) passions of these members that could be connected to the purpose?

c. It is necessary to vitalize all members of the group by connecting their passions to the purpose. One way of accomplishing this is through the following narrative pattern:

| The story of who I/we have been | → | The story of who we are | → | The story of who we are going to be |

The first story, the story of "who I or we have been" establishes an emotional connection between the speaker and the audience. The second story, the story of "who we are", reminds the group of the common elements that already bind them together. The third story, the story of "who we are going to be", generates a new story in the minds of the listeners about how they are going to act together in future.

It is the alignment of the three stories, the narrative coherence of the three stories, that makes thus narrative pattern so compelling. The present emerges inevitably from the past, and the future flows seamlessly from the present.

A – The group must have the <u>Autonomy</u> to innovate

I – the group must be getting <u>Inputs</u> from beyond the group

L – The members must be <u>Listening</u> to the group's <u>Rhythm</u>

Every successful group has a distinctive rhythm, which members must listen to, be comfortable with, and get in sync with.

Participants will also learn:

- ***Making it the narratives happen interactively***. A speech by a political leader like Obama is highly interactive phenomenon. In a non-political setting, there are also ways by which an analogous kind of interaction can be orchestrated.

- ***The dark side of collaboration***: Inspiring collaboration through fear involves a related but opposed pattern. The pattern appeals to the reptilian brain and can be effective to a certain extent. However the effort to make it work often entails exaggeration and demonization of enemies: the problem is that when the audience eventually realizes this, there is a backlash against the speaker.

- ***Measuring the impact on collaboration***: How to cut through cumbersome survey processes and get quick, actionable measures of the effectiveness of communications.

About Steve Denning

Steve Denning, organizational storyteller extraordinaire, is the author of several books on leadership and organizational storytelling, including *The Secret Language of Leadership* (Jossey-Bass 2007) and *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling* (Jossey-Bass 2005). Steve's article, "Telling Tales" was published by *Harvard Business Review* in May 2004.

Steve is the former program director of knowledge management at the World Bank.

He is now a Senior Fellow at the James McGregor Burns Academy of Leadership at the University of Maryland.

Awards and recognition:

In November 2000, Steve was named as one of the world's ten Most Admired Knowledge Leaders (Teleos).

In April 2003, Steve was ranked as one of the world's Top Two Hundred Business Gurus: Davenport & Prusak, *"What's The Big Idea?"* (Harvard, 2003).

In November 2005, Steve's book, *The Leader's Guide to Storytelling*, was selected by the Innovation Book Club as one of the twelve most importnant books on innovation in the last few years.

In June 2006, Steve was recognized as an All-Star Speaker by the International Association of Business Communicators.

In December 2007, *The Secret Language of Leadership* was selected by the Financial Times in its list of "Best Business Books of 2007".

In January 2007, *The Secret Language of Leadership* was selected by 800_CEO-READ, the book distributor, as the best book on leadership in 2007.

Praise for The Secret Language of Leadership:

Financial Times: "If business leaders do not immediately grasp the vital insights offered by this book, both they and their organizations are doomed."-- Financial Times, August 29, 2007.

Chip Heath: "Steve Denning is the Warren Buffett of business communication. He sees things others don't and is able to explain them so the rest of us can understand." --Chip Heath, co-author of Made to Stick Professor of Organizational Behavior, Graduate School of Business, Stanford University

Jim Kouzes: "I highly recommend you get it today and read it tonight. Tomorrow will be an entirely different kind of day if you do. –Jim Kouzes, Co-author of the best-selling, The Leadership Challenge and A Leader's Legacy