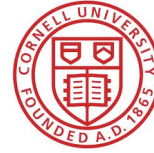




Agility Presentation at Cornell University

By: Nick Horney, Ph.D



On March 8th, I was invited by Dr. Lee Dyer at Cornell University to deliver a brief presentation and respond to a number of questions regarding Agility. Lee and I have been sharing thoughts and ideas about Agility since 2005. Dr. Lee Dyer is professor of Human Resource Management and Chair of the Department of Human Resource Studies at the ILR School, Cornell University. He holds BBA, MBA, and Ph.D. degrees from the University of Wisconsin-Madison. His research and teaching interests focus on organizational agility and complexity and human resource strategy. He has consulted and lectured on these and related topics world-wide. He has published several dozen journal articles and book chapters and over a dozen books and monographs.

Lee provided me with a number of questions from his graduate students to consider for the presentation and Q&A session. I've chosen one of the questions and an associated response to share with you.

QUESTION: *One perspective is that agile organizations need to leverage their front line people because they are the ones who have first-hand knowledge of possible opportunities and threats in the environment. These people aren't necessarily leaders, but it seems that they can play a strategic role in helping organizations adapt faster. CAN THE AGILE MODEL BE APPLIED TO FRONT LINE ASSOCIATES?*

RESPONSE: *Our work and research has demonstrated that front line associates are essential to the deployment of agility in any organization. To illustrate this point, a food server at a restaurant is a key front line associate. He/she can sense and respond to shifts in patterns of regular customers to the restaurant. (Note: Although a food server work environment is much more complicated than portrayed here, I have simplified it to make the point about front line associates agility.) If a family of four have been regularly eating at the*

restaurant on Friday evening for the past 6 months and the food server notices that there is a shift in the pattern to every other Friday, he/she could demonstrate The Agile Model in the following ways:

- 1. Anticipate Change & Initiate Action – The food server could indicate to the family that he/she has noticed that they were not having dinner every Friday as they had for the past 6 months and ask if there had been anything that the restaurant had changed that caused this shift (e.g., price of meals, revised menu, customer service issues, etc.). The food server understands the value of customer loyalty and has been empowered to do whatever it takes to give the customer a reason to return.***
- 2. Generate Confidence, Initiate Action & Liberate Thinking – The food server could ask what it would take to get the family back as a regular Friday evening customer. Within the guidelines provided by the restaurant’s management, the food server could offer a complementary bottle of wine, provide a 50% discount for their next meal, etc. in order to build customer loyalty.***
- 3. Evaluate Results – The food server could track the impact of his/her actions on the pattern of restaurant visits by this family over the next several months. The cumulative effect of this culture of agility with all food servers at this restaurant could make a difference between just surviving to thriving.***

We encourage you to provide your thoughts and comments to this question and others featured on our [LinkedIn Group site \(Agility Consulting\)](#).



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