

## **Hello, Communicators in South Africa**

**October, 2003**

I wrote this story originally for a Canadian magazine, but now I understand there are plans for Getting in the Groove to come to South Africa for the I.A.B.C annual conference. You will find this story gets you thinking in many ways about your professional life. And when you attend Getting in the Groove, you'll have a great time, too.

I'm looking forward to Brian Hayman, the leader of Getting in the Groove, returning to Canada and telling me what he's learned from communicators in your part of the world, too.

Getting in the Groove is a perfect opportunity to invite your most important clients, your colleagues within other departments of your own organization, and even some friends who work in teams, to join you in the audience, too. Have fun.

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### **GETTING IN THE GROOVE --**

The most entertaining way to learn, or is it ...

The most educational way to be entertained?????

**By Brian A. Kilgore**

A lot of career advice -- the work-life balance kind of mantra -- tells you to combine the hobbies you love with the work you do, but few can carry this off. One who succeeds is jazz pianist Brian Hayman, or is that organization development consultant Brian Hayman?

I saw him tinkling the ivories the other night, as jazz singing great Jackie Richardson filled the hall with a soaring song, but the audience were not primarily jazz fans. No, they were men and women

Getting In The Groove, which means attending a Hayman-led Getting in the Groove seminar on how to create and manage teams to accomplish a difficult task - in this case increase affordable housing in Halton region, just west of Toronto.

"But our Getting In The Groove audiences vary, and their goals differ widely," Mr. Hayman says. "What they do have in common is the understanding that it's difficult to make teams work well. And they possess the imagination and initiative to believe that learning about jazz and learning about teamwork, at the same time, will make their teams better, their projects more successful, and their own participation on the team more satisfying."

As Jackie Richardson's song continued, internationally known jazz pianist Joe Sealey slid onto the piano bench beside Hayman, Hayman slid off the other end, the song continued with no interruption, until it ended and the room erupted in applause.



By now Hayman was at a lectern, in business consultant mode - notwithstanding the black leather blazer -- and his "Getting in the Groove" presentation was underway.

Hayman, a former vice-president, Human Resources at Canada's Royal Trust, an HR executive with other companies, and a more-or-less conventional HR/OD consultant to a variety of private and public sector organizations, has come up

with an idea that a successful business team is like a successful jazz group. He's created a training program that brings this insight to organizations ranging from the non-profit housing group through government departments and agencies to shareholder-owned major Canadian businesses. Banks, perhaps surprisingly, love Getting In The Groove, and it was a South African banker who spotted the idea while in Toronto on business, and is behind plans to bring it to Johannesburg.

"Every session of 'Getting in the Groove' is a custom project," Hayman says, "and we take great care to find out what the main objectives of our clients are, so that once our session is over, its teams can begin to swing."

In the simplest terms, here's the idea behind Getting in the Groove.

A team and a jazz group are the same, because:

- Members come together for a limited time, but some stay longer than others
- Members are chosen for the "instruments they play," whether law books or saxophone, drums or marketing, piano or manufacturing
- Some of the team / jazz ensemble have worked together, but there are probably newcomers, too.
- Everyone's chosen for a particular skill, but how well they play that instrument matters, too.
- There's got to be a leader, but everyone gets to play solo.

And there's got to be some "music" written down. It is songs in a concert or a business plan at a company meeting, a play list in concert or an agenda at a conference. There certainly are many ways of playing that song, depending on the leader and the rest of the musicians / team members.

And, when the team is swinging, the applause gets deafening.

Hayman likes to start his presentations

with a couple of stories - at the affordable housing meeting he mentioned that he's known piano player Joe Sealey single elementary school in Montreal, and that back then they never thought they'd be playing music together while educating business people. And he mentions he used to work at the Steel Company of Canada.



That's important, he explains, because it means he understands what he calls machine bureaucracies - organizations that have fixed ways of doing that work. Smelt the ore, pour the ingots, make the bars, turn them to rods, draw the rods into wire, cut the wire and add the heads and the points and you've got nails.

A machine bureaucracy works pretty much the same way, day after day, following precise instructions. In musical terms, Hayman says, think of a symphony orchestra - talent at every step, music that's written down, a conductor who is clearly in charge, and an end result that's anticipated and achieved.

And then there's the "jazz" kind of a team - the musicians, or the executives, or the project team members have a pretty good idea of what they want, but nothing is known for sure, and every member of the team is expected to contribute to a satisfying, but not yet precisely defined, goal.

With the intros out of the way, the philosophy laid out from the lectern, it's

time for more music, and for the housing group, the song chosen was Bye-Bye Blackbird, put together as a conversation among the musicians.

In this conversation, one instrument starts off, another joins in, then Jackie starts to sing, some of the instruments drop out, others join in, and then finally everyone's back, the song builds, ends, and there's a burst of applause.

But this is a business meeting, a training session, and up on a screen come the ubiquitous PowerPoint slides, and Hayman The Business Training Facilitator gets to work. But what's different from so many presentations is the eyes of the audience remain open, as do their ears.

"What did you see, what did you hear, why do you think it worked this way, what questions do you have," Hayman asked, and the dialogue between facilitator and audience was joined by commentary from each of the musicians.

"In the sessions we've held so far, almost every musician has a different angle, a different perspective, on answering the question," Hayman says. "In South Africa, we'll have some local musicians playing with us for the first time. It happens in jazz all the time, of course, but it will be interesting to see how their non-musical contributions to the Getting in the Groove session compare to what we hear from the musicians in Canada. Jazz is universal - I think a lot will be the same."

The most frequent questions are, on the surface, musical, but turn into business strategy and tactics once you take a closer second look at them.

"Who controls the volume?" was a question at the housing meeting, posed between the first and second versions of Bye-Bye Blackbird, and the answer from Joe Sealy, was that the leader, in this case him on piano, set the volume level at the start of the song.

And, from the perspective of the audience, that was what did happen on the second version. Then Hayman asked for just one more take on Bye-Bye- Blackbird, and this time it started off in a middle of the road, medium volume, reasonable pace, but as the song progressed and other musicians joined in, the volume built and Jackie Richardson let loose, filling the church hall all the way to the rafters.

Since the affordable housing session, Getting In The Groove has entertained and educated some audiences as diverse in the business world as Dixieland, Progressive, and West Coast are in the jazz world. But all were businesses, just like all those genres are jazz.

"I keep getting surprised myself," Hayman says. "We did an afternoon session for an internal conference if engineering and construction managers, mostly engineers, from across Canada, and going in, I thought they'd be pretty conservative, straightforward, linear thinkers. Stereotypical engineers, but they surprised us in some ways, jumping into the discussions and asking for some of their favorite songs. But, thinking like engineers, they asked for the songs to be played in several specific ways -- testing the theory and structure, as engineers are wont to do. We had to cut off discussion, or they would have missed their flights home."

Hayman and his musicians took a different approach, and once again proved stereotypes are inaccurate, with a group of senior bankers.

This group booked Getting In The Groove for the whole day -- and their conference led off with a breakfast combination eye-opener concert and introduction to his jazz teamwork theory.

"And then, Hayman says, "we slid into a serious discussion of the theories of teamwork -- if we had not had the musicians there it would have seemed like one of those well-meaning training

courses that tend to induce sleep, but it was the music and the by-play between musicians and bankers that kept the room alive for the next couple of hours."

Then the musicians took a break, and the bankers continued on with business sessions up until late afternoon, when the group took to the stage again, sounded a fanfare, proved that Getting In The Groove works. "Our plan for late afternoon was to shift the balance over to about three quarters entertainment and twenty-five percent training or education," Hayman says.

"But," he continues, "we didn't anticipate the enthusiasm the bankers would have for reporting back on how useful the morning process had been in helping them work through their businesses activities for most of the day. They came back pumped, wanting to report to us on how they'd applied their lessons. We thought they'd done enough work, so after some discussion, a few more riffs to illustrate some points, it was time, like it is at every team meeting, to shut down the work and relax.

"So we cued Jackie, she started to sing, and, everyone relaxed and, as we like to say, got 'In the Groove'."

In the few months Getting In The Groove has been operating, the audiences have ranged from the not-for-profits to engineers, bankers, marketing teams, sales staff, and others. While the trip to South Africa is the first international gig, audiences members came from around the world for a four-session Getting in the Groove experience in Toronto this summer, sponsored by an HR communications consulting firm.

From Hayman's own business point of view, it's been interesting to see how training managers initially like the idea but are reluctant to commit to it, wondering how their executives will take to the concept. What's closed the sale in almost all cases is a reference from a senior executive who attended one Getting In The Groove, making the business case that Getting In The Groove really works as a training program, partly because it is fun, partly because it is memorable, and partly because it is so flexible it can be applied to every member of a team.

Is there a business lesson to be learned? From the Getting in the Groove perspective, the lesson is simple, when the team is rocking, the team is rocking.