

Competency Is Not Enough. Go Beyond.

BY JON GORNSTEIN

Take competency one step further by training for fluency, the ability to engage in interpersonal relationships.

In business, competency and fluency are far from synonymous. Competency is possession of knowledge of a particular task or subject matter. Fluency is the ongoing demonstration of expertise no matter how much time has passed since competency was first achieved.

Many companies view competency as an individual's ability to complete a technical job or task. In most cases, however, that is not enough — being competent does not make one fluent.

Consider an example. When it comes to a foreign language, some have basic competency — they understand what is being said or can speak at a basic level. On the other hand, they may lack the fluency to carry on an in-depth conversation.

The same scenario applies in business. Say an individual enters the realm outside competency and expertise and must connect with another person to establish insightful interpersonal relations. Weakness in this area exemplifies lack of fluency and represents a major obstacle to success.

The difference between competency and fluency can be especially glaring within the context of interpersonal relationships. Those whose expertise is in the sphere of technical competence tend to be very analytical and less perceptive



in recognizing and reacting appropriately to the subtleties of interpersonal relations.

Often their interpersonal behavior reflects a corporate culture that minimizes the importance of people and communication skills — a major oversight resulting in real bottom line consequences.

Why is this? Consider that interpersonal relations impact business outcomes. Those more skilled in interpersonal relations are more aware and insightful in their communications during negotiations and transactions. Such proficiency is a classic example of the difference between fluency and competency.

Fluency and Technology

Business development software support tools such as Team Visibility, Playbook and Mobile PC Game Planning have emerged to help achieve business fluency. The tools are sophisticated enough to take into account the variables that occur in interpersonal relationships.

The goal is to enable users to adapt their behavior to those whom they are trying to persuade — a subject not contained in compe-

tency technology, which has been relatively unchanged for more than two decades.

Through the use of handheld devices, learners can ascertain needs and the communication styles necessary for appropriate responses. These support tools are programmed to provide advice on recognizing and speaking the other party's language based on input from the user's observations, all accessible within seconds. Such capability can be an immediate help to those who never considered interpersonal relationships relevant to their profession.

There is another notable value to fluency: its potential impact on HR. Including interpersonal communication fluency among HR responsibilities can give departments a greater say at the corporate table — especially when financial results of fluency become readily apparent.

Instead of their traditional roles as cost centers, fluency's ROI offers the potential of transitioning into profit centers, a possibility bound to attract the attention of chief financial officers.

Organizations that move beyond traditional competency to fluency in interpersonal communications will find a competitive advantage in building trust and persuasion. It is up to the CLO to address fluency's growing importance.

Jon Gornstein is the founder and president of **Persona** GLOBAL, a change leadership consultancy. He can be reached at Jon@personaglobal.com.

