

# The Insomnia Factor

What keeps CEOs  
AWAKE AT NIGHT  
– and what to do about it.

The Monthly Newsletter  
of CEO TO CEO

Number 10 in a Series

## Too Much One-way Communication

An angry bee hive is very distracted from its work of making honey. One fast way to create an angry upset work team is to have flaming, angry, or confusing e-mails and texts circulating. Once the send button is hit, there's no stopping it.

This issue's topic, *Too Much One-Way Communication*, the tenth in the series, will take you through some common issues and techniques related to this common distraction. To read the first parts in this series, click [here](#) and start with the June 2010 issue.

### The Dirty Dozen

*I'm finding that there are a dozen distractions I encounter most often. I'm calling them "The Dirty Dozen." For each, I'll present how I've seen the distraction present itself, how it's caused the greatest damage, and what the key strategy is to mitigate the distraction because in truth, they'll never be fully defeated. The distraction at hand may be defeated, but tomorrow will bring a new one, a variant perhaps. Distractions will always be there, always decreasing our performance. But if we are aware of them and actively employ effective strategies to keep us on our path, we'll find our prize sooner.*

*All twelve distractions are controllable to a large degree. The first three are strategic in nature. The next four relate to planning. The last five are about people. But the order in which I will discuss them is no reflection on importance. Each organization is afflicted with a different mix of distractions, and you will find one or more that will immediately resonate with your personal experience.*

### Two-way oral communication builds relationships

Face to face is the original and most powerful form of two-way communication. Telephones and video conferencing were built for two-way communication. Both parties can hear attitudes, seek clarification, and adapt to the other party's emotions and subtext. In the worst case with phones, we get voice mail. That makes it one-way communication,

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Robert Sher

March 16, 2011

Just over twenty years ago I attended a free Tony Robbins event with my girlfriend (now my wife) where he asked us to write our top life goals. One of them was "Transcend the petty things in life." I do a pretty good job of it most of the time, and I still carry the original card that I wrote back then (ask me, and I'll show it to you).

But too often I come to workplaces where way too much time is spent on petty things—irritations, status, pride, insults (real or imagined) and silly stuff like the kind of pen the office manager authorizes. E-mail and instant messaging are two of the modern technologies that throw fuel on the fire and get people stirred up into a frenzy of distraction. Read all about it in this issue's essay.

CEO TO CEO

Assisting business leaders as they  
navigate critical passages

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## Presentations

March 17th, 2011 5:30 pm to 7:00 pm, Panel Moderator for Financial Executives International (FEI) San Francisco chapter. **Optimizing the CEO/CFO Pairing**, at Le Meridian Hotel, San Francisco. I've assembled a panel of CEOs who will engage in a discussion with senior financial professionals to delve into getting the most out of the CEO-CFO partnership. Open to all senior finance professionals and possibly others. If you're interested in attending (and not an FEI member) please **let me know** and I'll connect you with FEI leadership.

### The Dirty Dozen

- 1) *Strategy Tinkering & Obsession*
- 2) *M&A and partnering mistakes*
- 3) *Running out of money*
- 4) *The data and analysis obsession*
- 5) *Debates without decisions*
- 6) *Functional areas not synchronized*
- 7) *The wheels coming off the bus*
- 8) *Misplaced loyalty*
- 9) *High-maintenance employees*
- 10) *Too much one-way communication*
- 11) *Compulsive micro-management*
- 12) *The unpredictable boss/leader*

*(Corporate Distraction - continued from page 1)*

but still, the other party can hear our tone of voice, and we are communicating orally, which is the way most people communicate best.

E-mail is only a one-way, written communication tool. I love e-mail, and it has helped me in business in many ways. But we must keep e-mail in its place. Misused, e-mail can cost thousands of dollars. Here are some of the biggest e-mail mistakes, most of which are avoided by use of the phone.

**1. Tackling emotion laden issues via e-mail.** Few people have the skill, or take the time to craft a letter or e-mail that properly deals with emotional issues. Most of the time these e-mails offend, and the offended party saves the e-mail so they can be offended over and over again! Then they hit the reply button and return the favor. This is no way to grow relationships.

**2. Compounding the confusion by copying the e-mail to lots of people.** Not only can you now offend many people at once, but each can understand what you wrote differently, and each can reply to all recipients of the e-mail with their unique misunderstanding, requiring big, long e-mails with clarifications and apologies. Now you've offended everyone and wasted their time.

**3. Losing the opportunity for chit-chat.** Not that I'm the world's biggest chit-chatter, but on the phone, and in person particularly, you have a chance to be human, to show interest in the other person, or to whine about the weather. This is vital to every relationship, but is usually skipped in e-mail, and doesn't seem nearly as real in writing.

**4. Losing the opportunity to "upsell."** If you are on the sales side, every two-way conversation is a golden opportunity. Maybe it's to mention how this one product is so hot right now you can hardly make it fast enough.

**5. Trying to figure things out in an e-mail.** If you are trying to understand something, don't do it via e-mail with ten cc's! Some will take your mistaken assumptions for the truth (even though you are clear).

### Why Two Way Communication Works So Well

Two-way communication fosters growth of relationships for a number of reasons. A relationship grows when an event or an exchange makes both parties feel better about the relationship.

**1. We can hear the immediate reaction from the other person.** They can ask questions.

**2. We can listen or watch for signs of how they are feeling.** Tone of voice, facial expressions, tempo of the conversation, body language - all add immensely to our understanding of the situation and our ability to affect the outcome.

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**3. We can recover from saying the wrong thing, so misinterpretations will not be repeated (re-read).**

**4. We can tend to the other person's emotions or needs immediately.** We will have a strong feeling for how the other person came away from the exchange, which is very important.

E-Mail has its uses! Communicating details and facts is a perfect use for one-way communication. Addresses, purchase orders, quick questions, to-do lists, specifications, follow-ups from meetings, and more. One-way communications - e-mail now the most common by far - help get business done when it deals with facts, but never emotions.

### Strategies for Mitigation

- *Just for five seconds, consider what the best method is before you communicate. Call out poor communication choices whenever you see them.*
- *Never follow someone else's bad lead. If you get an e-mail that should have been an in-person conversation, get up and walk over to that person and communicate the right way. Say why you changed channels if appropriate, to help them have better practices.*
- *It is best to call a quick meeting (in person or via the phone) when appropriate, figure it all out courtesy of two-way communication, then write one carefully drafted e-mail with all the conclusions and facts for everyone to read and save.*
- *Write and share a communications policy that talks about the right channels to use for communication.*
- *For continuing offenders, get tough (if they report to you), write them up if needed.*

E-mail should never be an automatic choice. If it's an important relationship you're nurturing, think about the value of an old fashioned conversation. ■

Next month's issue of *The Insomnia Factor* will focus on Distraction #11, "Compulsive Micro-Management."

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## Recent Retainer Calls

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*Most of my clients put me on a retainer so they can have access to me whenever they need me. Here are some of the issues I helped them with last month.*

**Demanding Employee** A critical employee is moving abroad, and is getting a tad demanding about how they will be set up.

**Sales Territories** It makes sense to rearrange territories, but this will ruffle feathers. What's the best approach to make the needed changes, but keep the team happy and pulling together?

**Pricey Competitive Intelligence** An ex-partner of a competitor is offering to "consult" to my client about improving their vendor pool, but the price seems high and deliverables unclear.

**Time to Fire?** A direct report of a client delivers a disappointing performance. What is the appropriate reaction?

**Second Opinion** A client looks to hire a Sales VP, and wants me to interview for a second opinion.

**List for Sale** A competitor is thinking about selling their customer list. What might it be worth?



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