

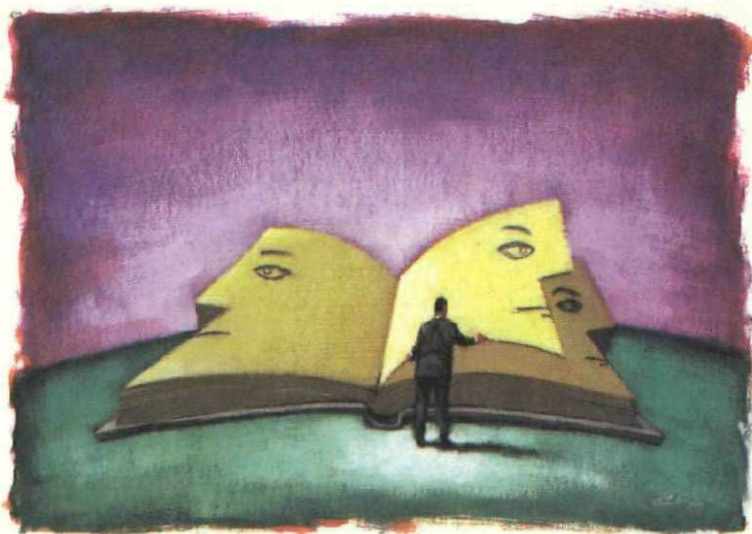
Executive **EDGE**

FINDING THOSE WHO KNOW

Large organizations are, in effect, banks of knowledge. With so many people on staff, there are sure to be experts in anything from aeronautics to Zen poetry who have valuable skills and experience. But when you need answers to questions, when you're looking for a certain set of skills, how can you find people according to what they know?

Some companies have found the answer in a company Yellow Pages, in essence a directory of expertise. The pages can provide a quick way to connect people with people and get technical answers. They can work as in-house labor markets, offering people a way to advertise their skills and a way for management to find people for job openings. Yellow Pages can also work as a fast way to locate people with the appropriate expertise when building project teams.

Bruce Boardman, head of metals



Chris McAllister

research at Deere and Co., calls their "People Who Know" directory an unqualified success. Designed primarily to help people get answers to technical problems fast, the system has also proved helpful in bridging the gap between old-timers and newcomers, as they get to know each other's talents.

Bechtel Systems & Infrastructure, Inc. (BSII) is an agglomeration of Bechtel's

work for governments and encompasses 6,000 people. BSII employees post their resumes—listing skills, current and past projects, supervisory experience, and so on—in a computer database. The system provides a way to get technical answers and also helps the company fill jobs from within.

Andrew Michuda, CEO of Teltech Resource Network Corporation in Minneapolis, offers a few tips on Yellow Pages.

- Make it more than telephone numbers. Go into some detail about individuals' skills.
- Keep it complete and current.
- Don't isolate it. Align it with e-mail and client data, for example.
- Make it easy to use and browse.

From Thomas A. Stewart, "Does Anyone around Here Know...?" *Fortune*, September 29, 1997, p. 279.

CAN BUSINESSES AFFORD STARS?

Companies make a big mistake when they value "star" employees more highly than "journeymen," argues Nancy K. Austin. In fact, she writes, "our fascination with outsize talent has become a management Maginot Line . . . [because] it's leading us to neglect our most essential source of strength."

Nonsense, counters Steven Berglas, PhD. He admits that some business stars have "an arrogant, imperious attitude that borders on . . . hostility" and can alienate coworkers. Nevertheless, Berglas argues, stars are worth the special handling they sometimes require.

What looks like arrogance may really be a mask for the star's fear of failure, writes Berglas. And if coworkers are alienated, that may be the result of jealousy. Should companies punish stage fright and reward complacency? he asks.

More important is the fact that the star's apparent arrogance can be seen as a good thing by other coworkers, espe-

cially those who are younger. "People younger than 35 typically love role models who have attitude," Berglas says. "Sure, stars are noisy, pushy, self-centered, and brash, but boy, do they set challenging performance goals."

Disagreeing, Austin writes that management theorists have become "so completely entranced by starshine that we're jeopardizing the real core of a business." Yes, companies do need to recruit talented leaders. But focusing on stars often causes firms to neglect the yeomen whose steady work produces real competitive advantage. Feeling unwanted, the yeomen look for new jobs. As a result, writes Austin, "productivity takes a swan dive, hiring costs shoot up, and you never can get a grip on what you do best, since the people you hired to do it keep leaving."

From Steven Berglas, PhD, and Nancy K. Austin, "Starstruck," *Inc.*, September 1997, pp. 60-62.