



**MANUFACTURING  
EXECUTIVE INSTITUTE**



## About the Manufacturing Executive Institute

The Manufacturing Executive Institute (MEI) is a training and publishing organization dedicated to bringing relevant knowledge to individuals who are interested in making dramatic performance improvements in their manufacturing and distribution companies. To learn more about the Manufacturing Executive Institute, go to: [www.mfgexecutive.com](http://www.mfgexecutive.com)

## How MEI Delivers Knowledge

### **MEI Live Training Programs**

These include several regularly scheduled and focused training series, and custom designed and scheduled training programs delivered either at MEI's training center or at a client company's site. To learn more about MEI's live training programs, go to: [MEI Live Training](#).

### **MEI Web-Based Training Programs**

These include numerous regularly scheduled webinar series and periodic special web-based training programs. To learn more about MEI's web-based training programs, go to: [MEI Web-Based Training](#).

**November 2009**

## **Manufacturing Ideas**

**A Monthly Web-Magazine for Manufacturing &  
Distribution Industry Professionals**

*"Your most precious possession is not your financial assets. Your most precious possession is the people there, and what they carry around in their heads, and their ability to work together"*

... Robert Reich

## **Computers Are Not the Only Way To Communicate!**

*By Alan G. Dunn, President of GDI Consulting & Training Company*

Have you noticed that more people are "visually glued" to their computers more than ever? Perhaps you have also noticed that many manufacturing and distribution company personnel would rather spend their day dealing with a computer than dealing personally with others in their company. This strange phenomenon of actively and aggressively using computer systems in daily job activities might have some negative side effects which we are all missing.

During a recent consulting assignment in a sizable manufacturing company, I noticed dozens of planners, schedulers and buyers who spent their entire day hunched over their computers performing a variety of applications. Certainly, these were important and complex activities that their company depends upon them to perform each day. But I also noticed that these same individuals rarely left their work areas to discuss business activities with any other person. Further, I noticed that NOT ONE of these planners, buyers and schedulers ever visited the very factory they were planning and buying for. Virtually all of their communication with others in the organization was accomplished via email or some other form of data transfer. I began to wonder if such an absence of direct human interaction is responsible for my client's chronically poor execution of well-constructed and well-presented plans.

Though use of information/communication technologies represents an exciting advancement in management tools, there may be some potential and serious dangers. After watching my client's personnel interacting for several days with virtually no direct personal interactions, and almost entirely with computers, several questions came to mind:

- If a person replaces human communication with computerized communication, will the individual lose human management skills, and more important, leadership skills?

## **MEI Publications & Resource Materials**

These include books, white-papers, archived webinars, web-based newsletters & other information of interest to the manufacturing and distribution communities. To learn more about MEI's available publications & resource materials, go to: [MEI Publications & Resources.](#)

## **Other MEI Services**

### **Manufacturing & Distribution Industry News**

MEI tracks current news, proposed regulations & industry events that are important to the manufacturing & distribution communities. This news is regularly posted to the MEI website, complete with additional links for those who need more in-depth information. To view the current news page, go to: [Current Manufacturing & Industry News.](#)

### **Manufacturing & Distribution Focused Research**

MEI conducts and supports ongoing research to extend the body-of-knowledge in various manufacturing and distribution disciplines. To learn more about MEI's research activities, go to: [MEI Research.](#)

### **Career Opportunity Clearing House**

MEI maintains a web-based

- Though email provides rapid communication capabilities, can it effectively provide the vehicle for all forms of communications, i.e. written, oral, non-verbal, etc?
- Can email replace the subtleties of direct communication that often carry the real meaning of the discussion?
- Is it possible that the computer is becoming less of a tool and more of a non-personal object in which to hide so one doesn't have to deal with tough issues or perhaps co-workers altogether?
- Is computerized communication turning our young managers and future leaders into conflict-adverse managers?

My observations suggest that computerized communication within an integrated information environment is exciting and informative. I have also observed that the better and more practical the information system is, the more people will use it. The more people use their systems, the less they communicate directly with their co-workers. The less they deal with their co-workers the more pronounced serious interpersonal problems become. And finally, the more serious problems exist in a non-personal communications world, the more people avoid these very same problems by burying themselves in their computers. Leadership clearly suffers even with a plethora of communication!

There is a very serious danger in teaching people to interact with others primarily with an electronic device. I say this not because individuals will necessarily lose their interpersonal skills. Ongoing training can help to ameliorate this. I voice this concern because burying oneself in a computer application while never coming up for air provides an easy vehicle for ignoring the need to make tough decisions and discuss critical issues with co-workers. The well-run interactive information systems environment might just be teaching our people to avoid decision-making, especially around important issues.

Here are some ideas for addressing this problem.

- Develop and present a BRIEF training program to ALL new employees who use computers and email in their day-to-day activities. The focus of this program should be to educate users in the danger of computer-only communications. It should also establish some principles and protocols for communications, including but perhaps not limited to:
  - If you can easily walk to the person's work area, meet with them personally. Use your email to memorialize the meeting and its conclusions. Don't make the email system the mechanism of discussion.
  - All complex issues that have several constituents should be addressed in collaborative meetings, not sequential emails.
  - Face-to-face meetings, telephone calls, web meetings and conference calls should always be considered preferential mechanisms to address complex issues.
- Educate people to remove themselves from their desks EVERY day and go see that which they are planning, scheduling, controlling and organizing. Remind them that it is OK to walk around a bit each day. They will surely learn something that their data could not reveal.
- Find those in the organization who are recognized as good leaders and engage them to educate the younger high-potential employees in ways to build internal relationships.
- Educate your people in the mechanisms of constructive conflict. Teach them that it is difficult to electronically vet all issues within a conflict. Conflict is fundamentally a human issue. Teach them that conflict can only be prosecuted in a constructive manner... that is, in person.
- Use ongoing training sessions to stress that personal relationships are the glue-of-trust in an organization, not CC'd emails! Drive this home

clearing house for manufacturing and distribution industry professionals to post their resumes and position desires, and for employers to post their employment needs. To learn more how to post a job or resume on MEI's Career Clearing House, go to: **MEI Career Clearing House.**

## Contact MEI

With a state-of-the-art training facility located in Corona, California; (*the geographic center of Southern California's manufacturing and distribution communities*), MEI is uniquely positioned to provide hands-on and electronically delivered training programs to all manufacturers and distributors. To learn more about the Manufacturing Executive Institute, its mission and additional programs, go to **www.mfgexecutive.com** or call (951) 736-2114.

every chance you get.

For the executive who worries about succession planning, it would be good to remember that those born after 1990 (and who are now entering the workforce), have NEVER known a world without the internet. They "text," "twitter" and email one another more frequently than the current generation of leaders EVER called or met with one another. Don't let this high frequency of communication without personal relationships trick you into believing that the new generation of business leaders' communication methods are better... they are not. It is just more frequent... and "frequency" has never been the metric of successful communication. "Outcome" (results) from communications is, and always will be, the measuring stick of successful communications.

**Alan G. Dunn can be reached at [agdunn@gdiconsult.com](mailto:agdunn@gdiconsult.com).** Feel free to contact the author of this article directly with your comments and ideas.

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(951) 736-2114

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