

Davis Studios

case study 2012c



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Leadership Coaching and Organizational Optimization

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Davis Studios Mission:

to support emerging artists of all ages

Summary

- who: Davis Studios
- where: Burlington, Vermont
- when: November-December 2012
- what: Art instruction studio looking to strategically grow the business to enable the founder to transition out of the intensive role she has played for a decade.

Introduction

Davis Studio is an art instruction studio offering classes tailored to a variety of ages and interests. The studio was founded in 2003 by Teresa Davis, an avid artist and teacher, to enrich the lives of students and the local community through providing high quality instruction and organizing arts based events. In the last year, business had grown sufficiently for Teresa to hire two part time staff to support the administrative functions of the studio and coordinate the burgeoning team of teachers that provide instruction for the classes Davis Studio offers.



With the onboarding of the additional staff members, Teresa's dream of being able to transition out of a comprehensive management role and into a part time, high level directorship role began to take shape. However, the vast majority of the information and capacity to operate the business resided in Teresa's head, and transitioning leadership to others was a time consuming and patchy process, thereby generating additional pressures and frustrations.

Davis Studio contracted with Round Sky for a Boot Camp training plus two additional facilitation training sessions during which time the team learned new methods for facilitating their meetings, making decisions, getting in sync with each other, a transparent accountability process, and information tracking system.

Methods

Before beginning the Boot Camp, Davis Studio completed a survey assessing their organization. The survey used both positive and negative measures and asked respondents to

Key Intake Challenges:

- *inefficient and irregular meetings*
 - *lack of clarity around who was handled what issues*
 - *frustration with irresolvable issues*
 - *inefficiency in certain processes and procedures*
 - *communication snafus with instructors*
 - *staff overwhelmed by workloads*
 - *pressure to strategically increase revenue*
-

answer using a 5-point agree/ disagree scale, where 1=strongly disagree and 5=agree. By this system, higher scores (indicating stronger agreement) are desirable for positive statements and undesirable for negative statements. For example:

I love my job and find it fulfilling.
I am frequently frustrated and unhappy with my job.

The 72 statements in the survey were collapsed into 10 categories, which covered both the organizational and individual levels. (Overall Job, Overall Organization, Management, Compensation, Physical, Tasks/ Workload, Recognition, Communication/Interpersonal, Systems, and Outputs/ Performance).

Scores at intake and exit were analyzed to assess change in the organization as a result of Round Sky Solutions' work.

Intake Snapshot

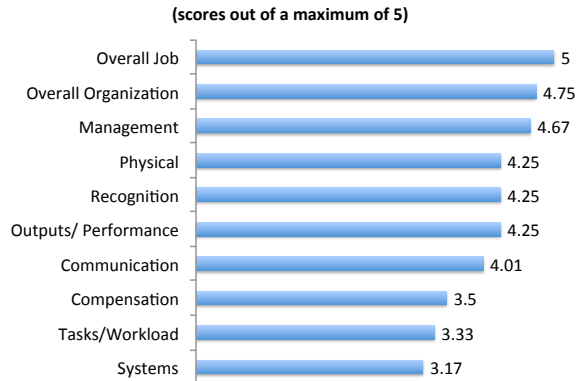
At the time of the intake survey the main issues that were reported by Davis Studio were: inefficient and irregular meetings, lack of clarity around who was handling what issues, frustration with irresolvable issues, inefficiency in certain processes and procedures, communication snafus with instructors, staff overwhelmed by workloads, and pressure to strategically increase revenue.



The overall scores on the intake test showed extremely high enthusiasm and dedication. Some of the areas where scores indicate room for improvement were compensation (particularly benefits), tasks/workload (mostly around having too much work), communications and systems.

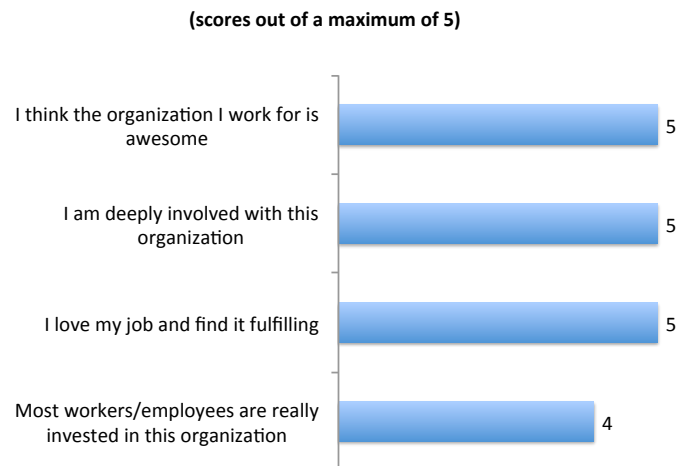


Intake scores were high for overall job, organization, and management, while scores on systems and performance were lower



“Working with Round Sky helped our small company be more effective than it ever has been. Our individual roles are clear to ourselves and to each other and our communication succinct. I don't doubt that the effects of this training will be long-lasting.” Lydia Littwin

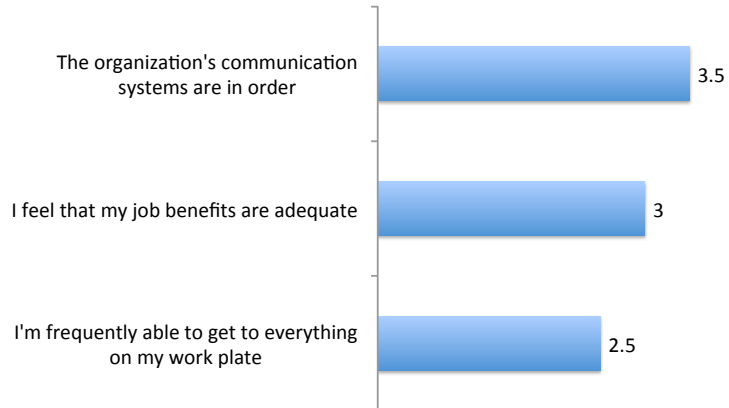
Davis Studios employees demonstrated enthusiasm and commitment



However, some issues showed room for improvement



(scores out of a maximum of 5)



In open ended responses to the question of what Davis Studio most needed, the following words and phrases stood out:

"When we hired Round Sky, our business was at a pivotal point of growth - and we were feeling growing pains. With their training, we resolved a lot of issues, clarified our roles with one another, and now have a constructive place to bring our concerns to be discussed in a supportive and helpful way that will not only help us - but the overall company as well." Beth Robinson



Solutions Implemented

Davis Studio launched their use of Round Sky's tools with a Boot Camp intensive introduction which led them through learning the tools by using their current business issues.



“Working with Round Sky solutions helped us tackle challenges in our business that we had been struggling with for quite some time. We saw immediate benefit from the systems we learned and we expect to continue to benefit for months and years to come.” Teresa Davis

Within the four week intensive, the Davis Studio staff met with Round Sky once a week for three hours and learned how to conduct meetings based on surfacing business issues, or tensions, identifying which kind of tension they were dealing with, and processing them using the appropriate tools.

In addition, they launched individual task tracking systems and learned how to use several tracking systems for information that came out of their meetings. They also completed a process of generating and explicitly clarifying all the roles and accountabilities they currently had functioning. The final session focused on training the staff on facilitation practices so they could continue to use the structured meeting processes and tracking systems after concluding their work with Round Sky.

Davis Studio chose two further facilitation sessions to ground and expand their capacity to facilitate themselves using these tools, completing those sessions with an elected facilitator and scribe, poised to continue their practice of these processes.

Implementation Challenges

The major challenges the Davis Studio staff reported were learning and immediately applying a new set of terms or framing for understanding and processing of their business tensions. Requests for a glossary of terms and an easier to follow, less wordy training handbook emerged from their closing suggestions for improvement. By the last two sessions, staff members reflected that this cognitive stretch had gotten much easier than their experience in the first few sessions.

In addition, the Boot Camp model due to its intensive, condensed nature asked staff to absorb and respond to information in a short time frame, requiring a rapid stretch into new cognitive areas and the integration of new personal practices. In particular, the individual task tracking system proved an unreachable stretch in the time we had for one staff member who nevertheless by the last session was so committed to integrating this skill that she engineered her own training support with the other staff members as a means of integrating the practice, demonstrating how the transparent accountability system encourages ownership and action.



From the instructor perspective, the Davis Studio staff integrated the practices remarkably well for the very short period of time they had in training, and obtained significant business clarity and capacity through the use of the practices. The twelve week training would have allowed for a more comfortable learning process.

Results

After working with Round Sky Solutions, the staff once again assessed Davis Studio. In answers to open ended questions, the key reported results were that several major blockages in their systems were worked through pretty quickly and resolved so that they could move forward effectively. In addition, the team reported one of the biggest improvements being learning the communication skills to be able to identify and resolve issues going forward, including being collaboratively clear about who is responsible for which type of tasks. They were also delighted at being significantly more efficient in their staff meetings.

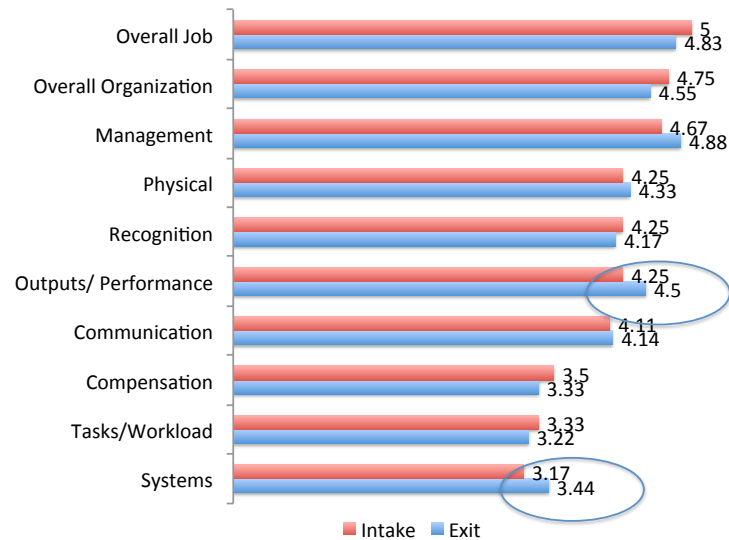
The staff resoundingly reported that the most useful component of their learning with Round Sky was the tension resolving system and tools along with the regularity and consistency of the practices. Furthermore, several of the staff had experienced the potential of extending these tools to other organizational settings such as board committee meetings or their own personal life.

Overall scores on the exit survey showed some improvements, namely in the areas of systems and outputs/ performance. Scores in other areas were flat and some declined slightly. Reasons for this could be because increased thinking and awareness about relevant issues prompted Davis Studios employees to recognize more areas where improvement was needed. These shifts could also be attributed to the limited time this team had for coaching; shifts after the twelve week training may well be more substantial.

"I want to support my staff to help them excel in their jobs and this approach gave me the tools necessary to do that."
Teresa Davis

"Each person on our administrative team gained clarity and we now have a process in place to support greatly improved communication and enhanced problem solving skills." Teresa Davis

Improvements were seen in some of the areas which needed them
(scores out of a maximum of 5)



In closing survey, some of the themes that emerged in the open ended responses were:



Conclusion

By the end of December, after six training sessions, Davis Studio had resolved some of their major presenting issues into more efficient and workable operating systems, clarified roles and accountabilities that enabled the staff to get their work done more effectively and with less stress, and learned

a set of communication practices that gave them the tools to produce these results themselves ongoingly.

