

Tom Little's

BIG IDEAS

for Non-Profits

In This Edition

March 1 to 5, 2021

After Teamwork, Focus on Personal Productivity

Tom shares ideas on how to use your time well, drawing on his own experience.

Hire Slow, Fire Fast

This week's Blast from the Past offers advice on dealing with the probationary period for new employees.

Headline News

After Teamwork, Focus on Personal Productivity

The Story

Over the last couple of weeks, your BIG Ideas newsletter has focused on teamwork and how to foster it. A related issue is personal productivity. How do you ensure you make the most of your time on the job?

The Skinny

The first step is creating and using a to-do list. Speaking personally, right now, I have two to-do lists, one for work and one for everything else. The problem is that both are about six pages long.

If you are like me, with lots of things you could be doing, you have to filter those lists to identify those actions you must undertake on any particular day. To address this challenge, I review those long lists and identify what I need to get done that day. This produces a second, short list, which may have just one or two items on it, depending on what is priority. It usually also includes some items actions I would like to complete if I have time.

Getting at those key actions isn't usually a problem, but I can't lie, the odd time I procrastinate. Maybe it's a proposal I have been asked to submit, where I think we have little chance of getting the work and therefore begrudge the five to ten hours I will have to put in on it. What I try to do in those instances is take at least a small bite out of getting it done, even an hour or two, to get me started or to maintain the momentum.

Having a schedule showing commitments over the coming days and months is also critical, along with checking it on each day to know what's coming up. When I have a Zoom meeting or a phone call, I try to ensure that either my calendar or my phone, or both, will alert me that it is pending. More than once, I have been saved by warning bells ringing, when I was totally oblivious to where I was time-wise.

The one strategy I am compelled to use, but which I have been unable to convince others to embrace, is time-tracking. As a consultant I bill for my time and therefore have to keep a time sheet. So I know where my time goes, even if sometimes I wished I didn't. In my opinion, all managers should keep a time sheet and use it to enhance their time usage. That time sheet doesn't have to be fancy – just some major headings. For example, CEOs/Executive Directors might include time spent dealing with the Board of Directors, on planning, on working with their direct reports, on promoting the organization, on dealing with funders and on fostering partnerships and collaboration. The Age of COVID would add another heading, at least temporarily.

The BIG Idea

There is no one magical way to be productive. It is mostly about winning the battle between the yin of wanting to accomplish things and the yang of all the impediments that get in the way. My BIG Idea for

this week is to keep a big todo list and a small one, to create a schedule of what's on the horizon, to find tricks to that help you overcome procrastination and to track your time, so you know where it's going.

Blast From the Past

Blast from the Past is a selection of previous BIG Ideas articles that you may not have read, or if you did, may have forgotten how helpful and insightful (i.e., brilliantly written) they were. This article is from 2016.

Hire Slow, Fire Fast

A few years ago, I attended a seminar in which a business owner was explaining his approach to recruitment. His advice was succinct: *Hire slow, fire fast.*

If you want to follow the directive to “hire slow”, one approach I suggest you consider involves the use of aptitude testing.

According to a CMCS client, aptitude testing can be “a high return investment A cognitive ability test provides an indication of the candidate’s ability to solve problems, digest and apply information, learn new skills and think critically. It is also the single best indicator of job performance regardless of the position... By screening candidates with a reliable and valid tool, you save management time interviewing candidates who will not make the cut and end up with better staff.”

If you think it costs a lot to do aptitude testing, think again. This client’s fees were very reasonable, under \$2,000 per year for unlimited use.

As for “fire fast”, the employer doing the speaking suggested that if an employee is showing signs early on of not meeting the requirements of the position, her/his performance is unlikely to change. The best time to part company is right away.

Many non-profits do not heed this advice, then end up with longer term staff who are not good performers but who can't be removed from their positions.

While this employer did not go into such details, remember that “firing fast” still must include a number of steps, starting at the point of hire to make sure it is not open to challenge. These are explained in an article titled PROBATIONARY EMPLOYEES: WHAT EMPLOYERS NEED TO KNOW, written by Barry W. Kwasniewski. They include:

- Define a probationary employee - e.g. an employee who is being tested to enable the employer to ascertain the suitability of the employee for its purposes.
- Define the probationary period - e.g. a period during which the employee may prove that s/he is suitable for regular employment as a permanent employee and will meet the standards set by the employer. This is period is usually three months but can be longer.

- Provide the new employee with a letter of employment and ensure it clearly establishes the employee's probationary status.
- Include a clause in the contract or letter stating that the employer may terminate the employment without cause or any form of termination payment within the probationary period.
- Provide the probationary employee a fair opportunity to demonstrate his or her ability to do the job.
- Set reasonable standards of performance, make them known to the employee and measure the employee against the standards.
- Provide a fair, honest and valid assessment of the probationary employee's competence and suitability for ongoing employment. Ensure the assessment is not arbitrary, discriminatory or in bad faith.

Lots of non-profits establish a probationary period but do not follow through to ensure it is used effectively. This can mean big problems later on. To prevent this from happening, adopt my BIG Idea for this week: "Hire slow and fire fast". If someone isn't working out, the fairest thing to do is to end the relationship before it becomes problematic.

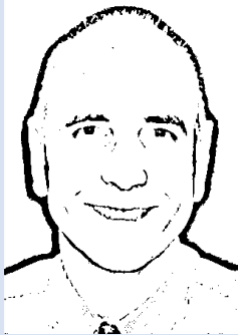
Current CMCS Clients

We are pleased to be working with York Region Centre for Community Safety, Community Living Thunder Bay, Canopy Support Services (formerly Tri-County Community Support Services), Community Living Port Colborne-Wainfleet, Community Visions and Networking (Quinte), Chatham-Kent Family Health Team, Community Living St. Catharines, Durham Youth Services, Community Living Association for South Simcoe, Camphill Community Services, Camphill Foundation Canada, Community Living Ajax-Pickering and Whitby, Tollendale Village and Willowdale Community Legal Services.

Recent clientele includes Literacy Network Northeast, Community Living Trent Highlands and Mill Creek Care Centre.

About Tom Little and Nancy Collins

Tom Little and Nancy Collins are the principals of CMCS.



In addition to consulting for many years, Tom has been Executive Director of a large human service organization, experience he brings to the table when working with his non-profit clients. In his younger days he was lucky enough to be part of three Canadian champion hockey teams while attending the University of Toronto.

Nancy's background includes a degree from Wilfrid Laurier and working at a downtown Toronto law firm. In her spare time, at least when there is no pandemic, she plays goal in women's hockey and catcher in summer slo-pitch. A life-long Leafs fan, she no longer apologizes for her unwavering commitment, given their resurrection in recent years. Now if they could just win a playoff round!



Testimonials

On behalf the Board of Directors, we would like to thank you very much for facilitating the work of creating a new strategic plan for our network. It was a pleasure to work with you and everything flowed smoothly. It is great to have this project complete! I hope we will get the opportunity to work together again in the future. **Rita Delaurier, Executive Director, Literacy Network Northeast**

Thank you so much (for your Board training)! Looking forward to the notes and your presentation was very well received! Lots of growth happening with the board and you helped steer more of that in the right direction. Really enjoy working with you and will keep you in mind for my other boards. **Natasha Cosulich Vemb, Board of Directors, Big Brothers Big Sisters of Clarington**

Thank you again to you and Nancy for all the work, dedication and effort put into this Operations Review. We made the right choice in hiring you to do this project and on behalf of the board of directors, I express our deep gratitude. **Roz Werner-Arce, Board Chair, Durham Youth Services**

Our Strategic Plan is moving along better than I could have imagined. I chair the group of around 20 Board and staff who have been meeting monthly for the past 6 months and plan to continue through the fall. Great enthusiasm from all involved and much is being accomplished already, particularly on renewed focus on our Mission and Vision. Thanks again for getting us off on the right foot! **Frank Moore, Board Chair, Community Living Central Huron**

Free Resources From CMCS

We offer a range of free resources to help non-profits be better. For your copy, contact us at info@cmcsconsulting.ca

Board Duties
Policy Board Model
Board Meeting Minutes
Board Decision-Making Checklist
Board Evaluation Form
Dealing with Risk
List of Possible Board Policies
Board Recruitment (Stop the BIG LIE)
Management Principles
Member and Director Qualifications
The Importance of Planning
Canada's Great Non-Profit Websites
Transitioning to the New Not-for-Profit Corporations Act

Tom's Book For Boards of Directors



One hundred and ninety-pages. Thirty-six *BIG Ideas*. Thirteen of them are *The BIGGEST of the BIG*, ideas Tom's experience says are critical to any non-profit. Then come twenty-three *BIG Ideas*, more ways to enhance the governance of your organization.

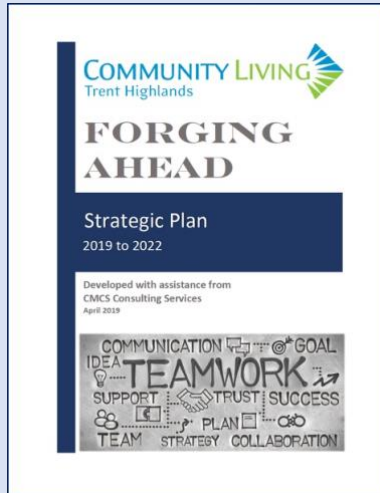
You don't just get ideas either. The book contains all kinds of resources for implementing them. For example, *BIG Ideas* includes samples of strategic and Board yearly action plans, and of evaluation formats Boards can use to rate their own work.

Tom Little's BIG Ideas is formatted as a work book, so it can be used on a continuous basis by the Directors. It is easy to read and has a fun quality your Board members will appreciate.

Just \$40 plus HST and shipping. For your copy, contact us at info@cmcsconsulting.ca.

More About CMCS

At CMCS, our specialty is strategic planning.



Since the start of 2018, the following 15 organizations have completed their strategic plans with help from CMCS:

- Kenora Association for Community Living
- Community Living Dryden-Sioux Lookout
- Community Living Trent Highlands
- Elmira District Community Living
- Literacy Northwest
- E3 Community Services
- Durham Region Child Care Forum
- Tollendale Village
- Centennial College School of Transportation
- York Region Violence Against Women Coordinating Committee
- Autism Home Base Durham
- Canoe FM Community Radio
- Toronto Island Residential Community Trust

York Region Centre for Community Safety
Literacy Network Northeast

We provide Board training that comes with a bonus: A Board action plan developed by participants based on the discussion.

Tom wrote his book for non-profit Boards, which you can buy and use as an ongoing resource. We are great facilitators and can help develop agendas for Board and management retreats.

Much of our past work has been in the human service sector, especially disability. But we have assisted in other sectors such as community colleges, local workforce authorities, family health teams, Big Brothers Big Sisters, United Ways and violence against women. We have even assisted a community radio station.

We have built our reputation on producing quality products that have great content and are appealing to look at.

CMCS Consulting Services
97 Sherwood Avenue
Oshawa, ON
L1G3L7
905 448 2428
www.cmcsconsulting.ca
info@cmcsconsulting.ca