



Introducing Cooperative Intelligence

By Ellen Naylor, Business Intelligence Source

In my 20 years in competitive intelligence, I have noticed that our focus is too often on process and monitoring the competition, and we neglect the relationships we must forge with individuals – the backbone of any successful competitive intelligence operation. Cooperative intelligence is both an approach and attitude that puts people in the center of the CI equation, and enables the CI practitioner to be more proactive in helping companies develop new opportunities.

BEGINNINGS

I have been networking since the age of four. In fact, I still am in touch with a half-dozen classmates from kindergarten days, although I schooled in Yokohama, Japan. I started Bell Atlantic's (Verizon) competitive intelligence initiative just before SCIP was formed. I had been selling for several years, so I realized the importance of creating and maintaining relationships one at a time. My first step was to meet as many people as I could in Bell Atlantic's commercial sales and sales support, since I had a hunch the best competitive intelligence tips would come from these folks.

Within two years, we had a great competitive intelligence process developed. It was relatively immune to corporate reorganizations since we had connected with sales, and they were almost impervious to corporate changes. In fact, we knew about competitor activity well in advance of their announcements, and we were in a great position to forecast future developments. This could never have happened except

through personal connections with the right people in sales, consultants, and industry experts.

A few years into my position at Bell Atlantic, I was asked to support the acquisition of a voice communications provider. This project allowed me to combine all the CI skills that are so valuable. It was all about people and identifying the right analytical tools to present our case. I had to identify who was for and against this acquisition and why. (See my article 'Impact strategic decisions with CI' in the November/December 2005 issue of this publication.)

WHAT HAS CHANGED AND WHAT HASN'T

Over the years, little has changed the importance of relationship building within the competitive intelligence process. Trust begins with communication, telling the truth, doing what is right, and doing what is good for people and the organization. When people trust you, they often will do what you ask them to do.

What has changed are the many ways we can communicate, and how we can be in touch 24/7 if we choose to be. Despite immense gains in communication via the Internet and wireless technology, we still need to develop and maintain relationships through face-to-face connection. In fact, companies place a high premium on our ability to be effective communicators in front of a group of people. But we get less practice since so much communication is now done via email.

Never before have clear writing skills been so important for conducting business. We need to be better writers just to get connected on the surface. With all our communication choices, we need to be sensitive as to when email communication isn't enough and it's time to pick up the phone or meet in person. We also need to learn the preferred form of communication for the various types of deliverables we disseminate to the key individuals in our network.

In his book, *Blink*, Malcolm Gladwell discusses the snap conclusions we come to in life's situations, instinctively and often without explanation (Gladwell, 2005). As we develop our relationships to build and maintain our competitive intelligence process, we are meeting people all the time and making snap decisions about their character, and they about ours.

Malcolm Gladwell also describes how Paul Ekman and Wallace Friesen have studied facial expressions and demonstrated how they provide valuable clues to inner emotions and motivations. How often have you heard words and felt that the facial expression did not match? There is so much misunderstanding about what we do in competitive intelligence, and our clients are looking to us to help them, yet they often don't really know what they need. We need to look for these clues as we interact with our clients.

TODAY'S CHALLENGES

Today, competitive intelligence practitioners need to be in touch with so many more people to influence our companies to innovate. Some companies in more mature industries are losing their competitive advantage by introducing fewer new products and services. Many publicly held companies are cost-cutting and reducing head count to manage their numbers for the next quarterly earnings report. Or they're merging with other companies in the same business as the market shifts away from their previously successful business model. High-tech and innovative companies are creating continuously, either organically or through acquisition, and product life cycles are becoming shorter all the time.

Another challenge we face is the emotions of employees we work with. It is very disillusioning when employees hear managers talk about their people being their greatest asset, and then treat them solely as a cost. With the continual stream of layoffs at companies, many managers don't want to get close to their employees. After so many years of working within confined roles, reengineering, downsizing, mergers and power plays, many people have become exhausted, cynical, and focused mostly on self-protection.

According to recent Gallup Polls, most employees in U.S. companies are either non-engaged or actively disengaged in their work. All too often people are ready and willing to do good work, want to contribute good ideas, and are ready to take responsibility. It's often leadership that holds them back, insisting that they wait for decisions or instructions.

IT'S ABOUT PEOPLE

In management's push for peak performance, we forget that organizations are comprised of individuals who are basically good people. Individuals are actually looking for ways to work together and to create more harmonious relationships. We are so often overwhelmed by problems that we can't solve alone. It's hard to dislike people who you really know.

In today's frenetic society, we tend to label people in greater detail to save time. We are quick to assign people to a personality type, and then neglect to really get to know them. For example, we know each other's personality types (Myers-Briggs), leadership styles, and even neurotic behavior. As competitive intelligence professionals, we need to make the time to get to know what really motivates individuals in our network, to be genuinely curious about them and determine why they are behaving in a particular way.

Listening to colleagues, their interpretations, their stories, and what they find meaningful in their work builds relationships. While we may not like some people or approve of their behavior, if we listen we can move past the labels. The stereotypes that have divided us often disintegrate when we discover that we can and do want to work together.

"People will forget what you said. People will forget what you did, but people will never forget how you make them feel."

Maya Angelou

When people feel that you care, their stress is reduced and they will contribute more to your combined projects. One of the key findings in knowledge management (KM) is that it is not new technology that entices people to exchange knowledge: it's the quality of the human relationship. In her book, *Finding Our Way: Leadership for an Uncertain Time*, noted management expert Margaret Wheatley suggests that KM should be renamed "human knowledge," to remind us where that knowledge comes from. Sound familiar? This is not unrelated to the attitudes about contributing competitive intelligence.

So what are some powerful motivators? People gain energy and resolve if they understand how their work contributes to something beyond themselves. Study after study confirms that people are motivated by work that provides growth, recognition, meaning, and good relationships. We want our lives to mean something and to contribute to others. We want to learn, to be challenged and be together, and be involved in the decisions that affect us.

"Motivation is the art of getting people to do what you want them to do because they want to do it."

General Dwight D. Eisenhower

Motivation is leading oneself from within and creating those same conditions so that others can follow suit. As a competitive intelligence professional, you are a leader. Before you can lead or motivate others, reflect on how you lead yourself.

Motivation starts with a good example. What leaders do says more about who they are than what they say. Great leaders put the needs of the organization first, and they do what they can to serve those needs. In his book, *Great Motivation: Secrets of Great Leaders*, John Baldoni cites Colleen Barrett, president and corporate secretary at Southwest Airlines, who has a great attitude toward her employees, “If you work hard and if you treat people with respect, they will never disappoint you in life” (Baldoni, 2004).

INTRODUCING COOPERATIVE INTELLIGENCE

As competitive intelligence managers, we can't control others' attitudes about us, but we can control our own attitudes and behaviors. Our attitude sets the tone, regardless of the other person's motivation, position, or personal issues. We can project a positive attitude as one who provides a valuable service, intellectual capital, and great connections. This is the backbone of cooperative intelligence as practiced in competitive intelligence.

Cooperative intelligence is relationship building, one person at a time. It is the green light to effective competitive intelligence. You can have the most effective processes in place and be the most intelligent, analytical, insightful, strategic CI person, and deliver a stream of products. However, if your peers and clients don't believe, trust, and respect you, you won't have staying power.

“You make a living by what you get. You make a life by what you give.”

Winston Churchill

Cooperative intelligence practices and attitudes are a win/win for the competitive intelligence process. It is developing your network by finding ways to help others. Reciprocity is the engine of networks. You are helped because you help others: no strings attached. Instead of focusing on self-interest, you are seeking the common good. Donna Fisher remarks on the boomerang effect when help arrives without explicit requests (Fisher, 2000). Like a boomerang, the help we give comes back to us, though often in a roundabout way.

“The best time to make a friend is before you need one.”

Mark Twain

SIDEBAR 1: COOPERATIVE INTELLIGENCE PRACTICES AND ATTITUDES

- Treat your clients with respect.
- Take a problem-solving attitude, but don't solve their problems.
- Identify the currencies of exchange with your contacts.
- Be a source for acknowledgement and appreciation.
- Maintain a positive attitude.
- Don't take yourself too seriously.
- Promote continual communication.

Cooperative intelligence also encompasses emotional intelligence and appreciative inquiry – practices to make us more balanced advisors. Many companies do not take advantage of learning based on interviewing customers when they win significant business or have a great relationship. Competitive intelligence professionals are often so critical that we don't seize the opportunity to build on our company's strengths in our cold pursuit of the competition. Wouldn't sales respond better to the more positive approach of appreciative inquiry, “How will we improve market penetration in this industry?” versus the more critical approach of “We're losing share in this industry: what are we doing wrong?”

We need to broaden our scope in competitive intelligence to include market developments, competitor history, global ramifications, and technology. We can lift ourselves out of tactical competitive intelligence and offer a more balanced perspective of our shifting position in the ever-changing global marketplace. The esteemed former chairman of Motorola, Bob Galvin, shared his broad perspective toward CI during his keynote address at the SCIP 2005 Conference in Chicago. He went as far as to say that Motorola would even study the archeology of a culture outside of America to gain further insight into how a competitor's leadership thinks and might act.

Regardless of what type of company we support, competitive intelligence professionals cannot afford to be passive data collectors who merely monitor competitors and identify new targets. We have a great opportunity to proactively help our companies identify new markets, new technologies, and ways to expand current markets. The Internet, secondary databases, and trade journals are essential sources to monitor the competitive landscape and to locate people. However, if we just rely on secondary sources and don't connect directly with the right people, and help connect people with each other, we will fail in our CI efforts over the long term.

Incorporate the cooperative intelligence practices and attitudes outlined in Sidebar 1, and you will benefit by

“Most information never gets written down – it’s just floating in people’s heads. The only way to access information is to talk to people.”

Jan Herring, CI guru

building and maintaining professional relationships that will be enduring, the backbone of any CI unit.

In future columns, I will describe the stepping-stones of cooperative intelligence and how they will help you be more effective as a competitive intelligence practitioner in today’s increasingly competitive marketplace, not only from global competition but from internal company competition. (See Sidebar 2.) I will provide ideas and suggestions to build and maintain two-way communication with executives and key champions and help them recognize your value.

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SIDEBAR 2: SOME STEPPING STONES OF COOPERATIVE INTELLIGENCE

- Adopting the cooperative intelligence attitude of giving and its relationship to building dynamic networks.
- Using more positive approaches when seeking CI such as appreciative inquiry.
- Leadership of self and management by example.
- Motivation and its role in CI, including emotional intelligence.
- Building a productive and enduring human intelligence network.
- Developing the right written and oral communication skills for CI.
- Evaluating and marketing your value proposition as a CI professional or team.

Ellen Naylor, founder of Business Intelligence Source, has been a competitive intelligence practitioner and consultant for more than 20 years and an active SCIP member since 1990. The Business Intelligence Source’s offerings include developing a CI process, conducting win/loss or trade show analysis, and training workshops. Its latest practice is cooperative intelligence, helping CI professionals become more effective in networking and communicating with people—the backbone of any successful CI operation. Business Intelligence Source is a SCIP premier partner, and Ellen is a SCIP Catalyst Award winner and a member of SCIP’s Women’s Leadership Council. She lives at 9,000 feet in the Colorado Rocky Mountains with her husband, Rodgers the artist, and Cocoa the cat. If you have any comments on this article or any of the future columns Ellen would love to hear from you at answers@thebisource.com.

Competitive Intelligence Ethics: Navigating the Gray Zone Now Available

The Society of Competitive Intelligence Professionals (SCIP) is pleased to announce the availability of its newest publication *Competitive Intelligence Ethics: Navigating the Gray Zone*. This book, the first in a series entitled *Topics in CI* produced by SCIP’s CI Foundation, examines issues surrounding competitive intelligence ethics with outstanding contributions from some of the world’s most respected and experienced corporate, consulting, and academic competitive intelligence professionals. In addition, *Competitive Intelligence Ethics* includes over 30 examples of actual corporate ethics guidelines and implementation steps the reader can apply to their organization. Order online at www.scip.org

