Merge's Monthly Mega Minute – August 2008

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Merge Gupta-Sunderji turns managers into leaders. Through engaging keynotes and facilitated workshops, she gives people specific and practical tools to achieve leadership and communication success. Contact her at www.mergespeaks.com or 403-605-4756

Use Ockham's Razor for difficult decision-making

As a leader, you are called upon to make decisions daily. Many of them are second-nature and come easily, but every so often you are faced with a decision that requires you to step outside your comfort zone. Maybe it concerns something with which you have limited experience, or perhaps the consequences of the decision are significant; either way, you find yourself wrestling with a myriad of options, none of which are straightforward. In difficult situations like these, it's worth borrowing from the world of science.

Ockham's Razor is a scientific principle attributed to the 14th century English logician and Franciscan friar, William of Ockham. While the principle itself is much more complex, roughly translated, it states:
   All other things being equal, the solution with the least number of assumptions is the best.

If you are faced with several alternatives that are approximately equivalent, evaluate each one to determine whether it is based on facts or conjectures. The alternative that has the fewest conjectures supporting it is the one you should choose.

Here's an example. Suppose that you are trying to decide which hotel to use for your next senior managers' meeting, and you have narrowed it down to three equivalent facilities. The first hotel has a significantly better rate, but cannot guarantee that you will get a large enough conference room for your use. The second hotel is more expensive, but will confirm all of your requirements immediately. A third hotel is at the same price as the first, but is much farther away from your offices and so all the managers may not be able to attend, Using Ockham's Razor, since the first option "assumes" that you will be able to get the room size you need, and the third alternative "assumes" that all your managers will attend, despite the fact that it is the most expensive, you would select the second hotel.