

Organization Intervention
ELTON DISTRIBUTORS, INC. – Part 5

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The consultant and the family members of the management team left at 7:00 a.m. on Friday morning, driving together to the cabin. While there was much interest on the part of the management team to talk about job-related issues during the drive, the consultant discouraged such conversation. On arrival, an agenda was presented:

1. Small Group Dynamics
2. Contracting
3. Values Clarification Related to the Work Situation
4. Leadership Styles
5. Conflict Management
6. Company Philosophy
7. Begin Long-Range Planning

Things moved along smoothly in the beginning. Everyone anticipated a fairly “heavy” emotional environment, but everyone had come prepared to deal honestly with the issues that were present. It was clear that respect among the family members was higher than the anger levels; everyone worked very hard to understand the issues that caused others to be angry with them. During the Values Clarification exercise, each member of the management team was given a sheet of newsprint on which they were to answer four questions:

1. Why do you work?
2. Why do you work at Elton Distributors?
3. What do you like about working at Elton Distributors?
4. What do you like least about working at Elton Distributors?

When these responses were taped to the walls, valuable discussion took place about how people were motivated by different things, as well as how alike the brothers were about some values. At the conclusion of the Values Clarification exercise, the group walked to town (about 20 minutes away) for lunch and exercise.

After lunch several conflict issues that had been identified by the consultant were laid on the table one at a time, with the consultant and the non-involved brother (Dan) serving as process observers as those involved attempted to resolve their conflicts. This was the part of the retreat that all had anticipated with misgivings, yet it was a very positive experience. In each case the parties involved in the conflict agreed to a specific contract. Some of the contracts agreed to included: to hold a weekly management team meeting, to meet as a subsidiary company management team biweekly, to complete a form by a specified date, to meet to discuss the implications of a new computer program, and so on. This process took the rest of Friday, with a two-hour break for fishing and a

90-minute break for dinner at a nearby restaurant. The evening was capped with a game of cards.

The next morning the team was so pleased with the processes that had been used the previous day that they asked that the last two items on the agenda be postponed, and that the consultant help them work through some major problems within the company that seemed applicable to the problem-solving tools that had been used the day before. The rest of Saturday was thus spent making decisions about whether Dick should be retained by the company, returned to his job as sales manager, retained in his current job function as coordinator of the subsidiary and branch offices, or be given a new responsibility. A force-field analysis and value voting process were used in which it was decided that Elton:

- a. did not want to lose Dick.
- b. did not want to use him as sales manager or subsidiary/branch office coordinator.
- c. wanted to use his sales skills.

Having reached that decision, it was decided to offer him the position of account and special projects manager with no decrease in pay and with incentives for greater pay. Special projects were then brainstormed, discussed, and prioritized. Detailed steps were developed for the top two projects identified. Peter contracted to meet with Dick within the next two weeks to get his response. Everyone hoped it would be favorable, not only for what Dick could offer to Elton's, but also what he could offer the competitors if he decided to leave.

With limited time remaining, the consultant asked for feedback of the weekend which was very positive. The team asked if it would be possible to meet a couple more weekends during the summer. The consultant also checked out his performance to insure that the company wanted him to continue working with them. Finally, the consultant suggested that the company consider hiring two interns for the summer—one to work on developing the procedures manual; the other to develop an action plan for training.