

## **The Forum Think Tank Focuses On Virtual Employee Engagement**

### *Highlights Sports Coaching Parallels and Nick's Pizza & Pub Success*

Nov. 14, 2011 NAPERVILLE, Ill. – Engaging virtual employees, using successful sports coaching techniques to manage employees and learning how a Chicago pizza guy created an exceptional workplace were the focus of **“The Enrichment Experience: Engaging Great Minds and the Power of People in the Workplace,”** the Fourth Annual Think Tank presented by [The Forum: Business Results Through People](#) held recently at Chicago’s Second City.

“With off-site workers now representing up to 40 percent of the U.S. workforce in companies with 5,000 employees or more and as many as three out of four organizations already using remote employees, we felt it was important to examine ways that employers can better engage their remote employees,” says The Forum President Keith Fenhaus, who is also president of Hallmark Business Connections. He explained that The Forum’s latest study examined the challenges of building relationships between a company and virtual workers who may feel disenfranchised due to geography or cultural barriers. “We approached the study by interviewing leaders at several organizations that have made virtual work arrangements a routine part of their business: Accenture, Adobe, Automatic, Cisco, Performics and United Healthcare,” Fenhaus continued.

Analysis of the interviews resulted in these key findings presented at the Think Tank:

1. Engaging remote employees must be a strategic part of a bigger virtual employee management practice endorsed by top organizational leaders.
2. Virtual employment helps address the trade-off between finding quality talent needed within a restricted geographic area.
3. Periodic face-to-face contact can help overcome the disconnect of distance.
4. Formal policies and programs for virtual employees enhance the performance and quality of the work experience.
5. Companies need to invest in technology that empowers virtual employees.

6. Leaders need to actively work on integrating virtual employees into the organizational culture.

The Forum's Academic Director Frank Mulhern, Ph.D., of Northwestern University, added to the event's discussion by presenting the results of a recent study regarding "[The Parallels Between Athletic Coaching and People Performance: An Exploration of Shared Concepts.](#)" He commented, "The single most important aspect of successful sports coaching is building and maintaining personal relationships between players and their coaches; the same is true for organizations--people perform best in their roles when their organizations support all aspects of their lives." Mulhern shared key findings of his recent study:

1. Know the whole person – organizations should have genuine concern for all aspects of an employee's life.
2. Establish and maintain a culture of respect that goes both ways.
3. Provide customized, individual attention.
4. Create an environment that promotes superior communication.
5. Promote a sense of pride and belonging.
6. Be highly responsive to individual needs.

The Think Tank featured speaker, Nick Sarillo of Nick's Pizza & Pub, shared his view that "people are his competitive advantage." He urged attendees to "be explicit about the culture you want" and that "leader behavior must continuously reinforce the organization's culture and values." Rather than focusing strictly on his product, Sarillo explained that he built his success around three core values: (1) building trust, (2) having a purpose and values, and (3) a "trust and track" versus a "command and control" culture.

He endorsed an "open book/transparent" management approach that creates a "safe space" for employees through "high performance communication that eliminates drama and conflict to find active solutions." Part of his communication process uses a "two-way feedback loop" that includes performance feedback as well as "direct feedback" (five

words or less). Most importantly, he stressed the value of “celebrating daily successes” with employees.

The Forum Research Director Dr. Jennifer Rosenzweig, and cast members of Second City Communications joined in the daylong workshop that combined comedy skits, learning modules, speakers and group discussions designed to energize the business leader audience.

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**About The Forum**

The Forum: Business Results Through People ([www.BusinessResultsThroughPeople.org](http://www.BusinessResultsThroughPeople.org)), affiliated with Northwestern University, is an organization for thought leadership advocating that the most effective way business leaders create and sustain organizational values is through partnership with people.

**About Nick Sarillo**

Nick Sarillo is the founder and CEO of Nick’s Pizza & Pub, located in Crystal Lake, and Elgin, Illinois. Nick has been featured by *Inc.* magazine, FOX Business and *Newsweek* for his creative and values-driven approach to leadership and training. Find Nick and Nick’s Pizza & Pub on Facebook and on Twitter at @Nickspizza.

**About Second City Communications:**

Second City Communications is the innovative business solutions division of the world famous comedy theater, The Second City. Alumni include: the Belushi’s, Harold Ramis, and Gilda Radner. For more info visit [www.seconddcitycommunications.com](http://www.seconddcitycommunications.com) .