

# the WATERCOOLER

straight talk on strategic issues®

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**Bill Jensen**  
Chief Executive Officer  
The Jensen Group

Point of View

## Simplicity Just Got Urgent

**in a world** of morebetterfaster, simplicity has always been crucial. Throughout the next decade, however, your ability to build simplicity into working with people could determine the winners and losers in the war for talent.

Consider that over the next decade in the U.S.,

- 70+ million Boomers will retire or re-focus their careers.
- 70+ million GenYers will enter the workforce.
- The average tenure at one job will be 18 months (Gartner) and even shorter for GenY: "If I don't like it, I'll just quit."
- What GenY will find: Of four stakeholder groups — company, executives, customers, and workforce — the workforce currently gets the least attention paid to simplifying things for them.
- For GenY, user-centered training, development, and work tools will be key in whether they stay or they leave.

This new workforce will embody an alarming paradox. On one hand, they are the first generation ever to be raised

on and trained for the total democratization of information. They will expect Google-like access to anything and everything, as well as totally user-centered experiences. On the other hand, according to Pew Charitable Trust, 50% of them will arrive without the skills they need for complex analysis and reasoning and clear communication.

Looks like a fun decade, huh? Well, it can be.

### Simplicity: The New Competitive Advantage

While due diligence on simplicity can get rather, well, complex — knowing what to focus on is rather easy. Everything comes down to two basic criteria: How you use people's time and how you use their attention.

This is what separates GenY from every past workforce. GenY will be extremely protective of these personal assets. Want their attention?

Please turn to page 7.

#### Look Inside!

*Compass at Anchor Blue  
– A Perfect Fit!*

*Great Managers and  
Fresh Produce*

*Plus a ready-to-use visual  
tool you can use now!*

Visit us at  
[www.rootlearning.com](http://www.rootlearning.com)





**Elaine Gregg**  
Senior Vice President, Chief People Officer  
Anchor Blue Retail Group

## Case Study

# Compass at Anchor Blue – a Perfect Fit!

## at anchor blue

Retail Group, we target young people whose wardrobes are based on denim and jeans. At peak season, we employ about 5,000 people in Anchor Blue stores and Levi/Docker outlets. After a few years of market share and revenue decline, we knew we faced a challenge. For years, we had been locked in the past and stifled with antiquated processes and systems when we should have been paying attention to customers and building for the future.

When a new leadership team was brought in to effect a transformation, we started with a commitment to invest in developing competencies and changing the behaviors of people throughout the organization. One of the first things we wanted to do was to create leaders and store managers who would become stellar at engaging people in our strategy. In the competitive retail industry, we knew our strategy had to deliver significant growth in market share and revenue and our leaders were the driving force in this change.

We firmly believed that overhauling infrastructure and crafting more customer-centric strategies were only part of the solution, and that equipping people in leadership

and management positions with the information and skills to bring that strategy to life would ultimately make the difference. The plan was to develop leaders who could excel at engaging people to grow store sales. Our approach focused on knowing the business by understanding the big picture, engaging peers and teams in the strategy, and sustaining the culture.

To do this, we went beyond rhetoric and invested heavily in making this happen. In addition to creating two new functional areas, People Development and Communications, we guaranteed that everyone in the organization would have a “great boss.” We didn’t make this commitment lightly, and worked with Root

and its management development program (*Compass*) to ensure that we could deliver great bosses – who understood the strategy, the customer, and their role in developing people and engaging them to make a difference.

The *Compass* program’s framework combined

capability development with a key (but often missing) strategic component. The modules were customized – which was critical – but what made this program different from any other leadership training is the Root methodology that allows people to come to their own conclusions. They reach their own realization



Please turn to page 7.

**Gary Magenta**  
Vice President, Client Solutions  
Root Learning Inc.



## Industry Perspective

# Great Managers and Fresh Produce



**for years,** I've been fascinated by managers. The more I learn, the more I realize their vital role in the execution of strategy. I'm convinced that the development of managers should be a top priority for organizations wanting to deploy and sustain business strategy. But experience tells me that managers are the single most underinvested-in group in business today, yet they are at the heart of every business. Their role is to ensure that the strategy coming from the leaders is interpreted consistently and that the front line is engaged in the execution of that strategy.

About 7 years ago, I was working with a large grocery chain to deploy a customer service strategy directly connected to new brand messaging. Everyone from corporate through part-time would be engaged. The goal was to create the understanding that each team member represents the brand through every customer interaction. They also wanted everyone to know that *clean, fresh,* and *in-stock* were key factors in customer service and the brand experience. Finally, everyone needed to view the brand and customer service as an advantage over the competition.

As we tested the training tools, managers started asking great questions about their role in bringing this initiative to life. This team of managers had always used a control-and-command style, but they knew that this would no longer work. They wanted to know how to connect this idea of brand and customer service to hourly workers in a way that was tangible, actionable, and measurable. They wanted to understand their role and what they needed to do differently.

With these questions as our foundation, we dissected the composition of successful managers, those who could truly drive results through their teams. What we found was no surprise – great managers engage their teams continually and know how to link individual efforts to team goals and team goals to the overall strategy. We designed a

way to help managers see their role as their teams' Chief Engagement Officers, and we developed some basic tools to help them “fake” their way through this concept of engaging their team until they could really “own” it.

By working with many managers in dozens of organizations, we've been able to hone these learnings. You might be surprised – or not! – to know that the keys to developing great managers are very basic. But together, these foundational elements forge a manager development framework that really makes a difference.

1. **Know My Business** – where competitors are strong, what customers expect, and what sets your company apart from the competition.
2. **Know My Role** – that managers should spend most of their time developing a great team of people.
3. **Connect My Teams to the Business** – connecting team members to and engaging them in executing strategy.
4. **Deliver Results** – building effective relationships, setting expectations, coaching and developing, and following up.

Within a few months of implementing this framework at the grocery chain, we heard this story. As a produce manager walked to his car, a teenaged employee called to him as he collected carts from the parking lot.

“Are we gonna hit it?” the employee asked.

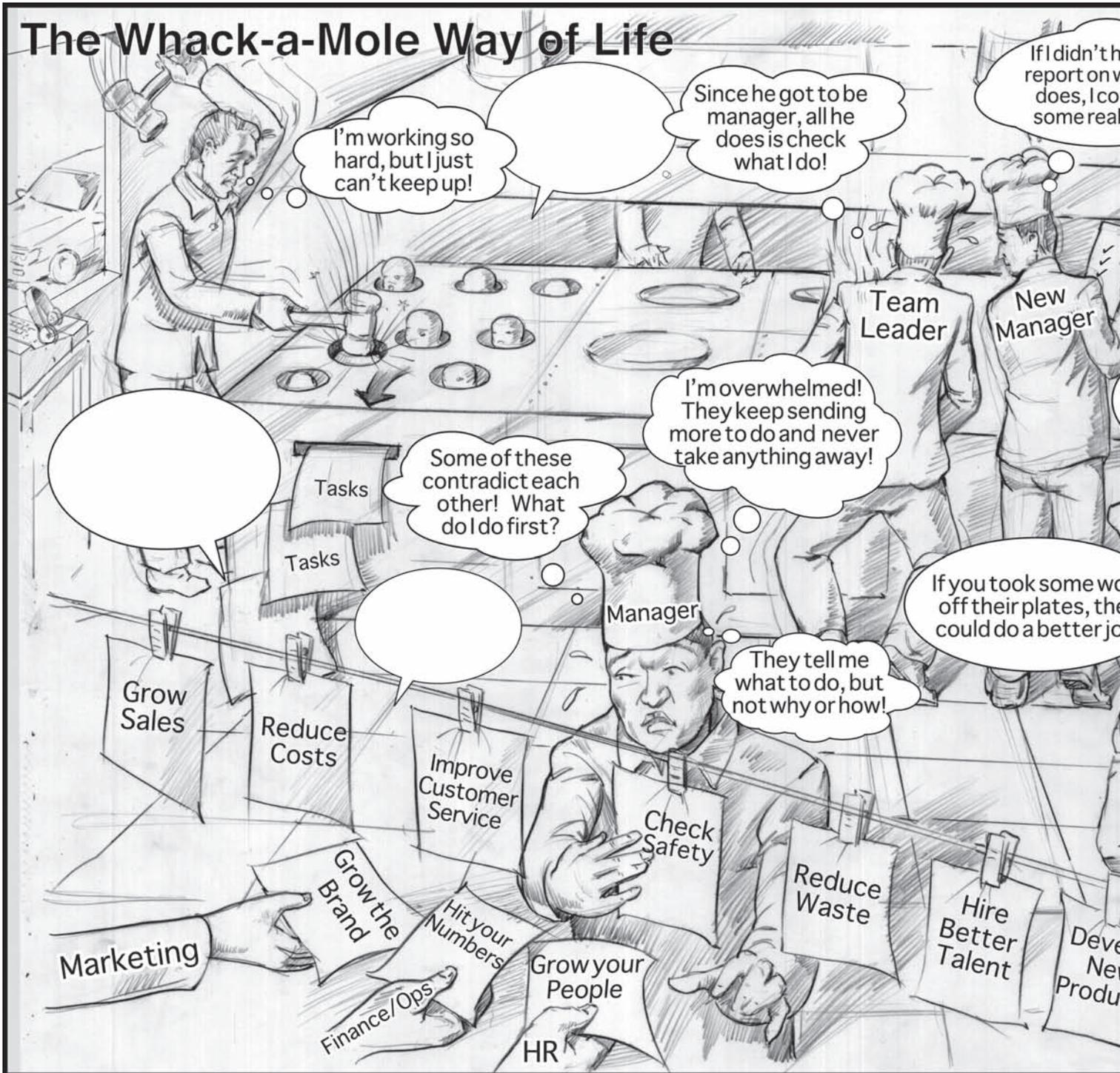
The manager was puzzled. “Hit what?”

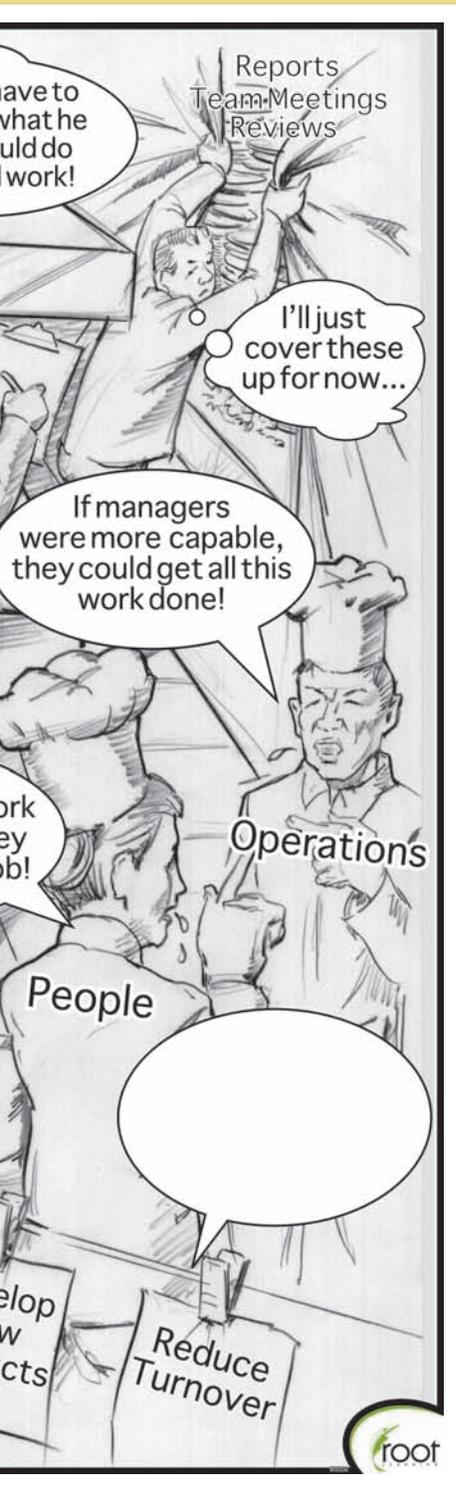
“Are we gonna hit our number? I know we've got a chance to have our best month ever in the produce department. Do you think we're gonna do it?”

In that moment, the manager recognized what had happened. This part-time, non-career employee understood his department's goals, how the game was played, the current score, and his connection to the big picture. More than that, he was determined to achieve the goal. He was engaged! And the manager understood his own role – as a great manager who created that engagement. 🌱

Try this with your team!

What's the state of the management team at your company? Does it resemble this sketch? Gather your team around this illustration and ask the questions on the facing page.





# the Whack-a-Mole Way of Life

Often, managers see life like the people in this picture. They are constantly barraged with new tasks and initiatives while none of the old ones are taken away. As in this scene, they begin to feel hopeless. Working harder, not smarter, seems like the only way to survive.

Gather your team around this visual and discuss the questions. Is whack-a-mole part of your workplace?

1. Describe the overall scene in the kitchen.
2. The manager at the bottom center has problems! Read his three thought bubbles. Are these three problems common at our organization? Do our managers face these types of challenges?
3. Describe the man at the upper left and read his thought bubble. Do his actions translate to our workplace?
4. The two people at the right illustrate the difference of opinion held in many companies about managers. Read their conversation. Have you seen this happen? How do you deal with it?
5. Describe what is happening with the man at the upper right and read his thought bubble. What things are stashed in our pantry?
6. The new manager is micro-managing the team leader. Read what they're thinking. How do you think this person got to be a manager in the first place? How may he be qualified – or not – for the job?
7. What other problems do our managers deal with daily? Write them in the blank bubbles.
8. How can leaders make the workplace less overwhelming than this kitchen seems to be? What can managers and individuals do to communicate the situation?
9. How could all our people benefit from clear, practical manager training? 🌱



**Jim Haudan**  
Chief Executive Officer  
Root Learning, Inc.

From the CEO's Desk

# the Manager's Role in the Whack-a-Mole Game

## management

can be like playing whack-a-mole – the old kids' game where you try to pound down whichever mole pops up through the hole. While it can be an exciting challenge for a child, it creates utter frustration for adults trying to manage a business in the same fashion. In business, moles represent a mixture of new strategies or priorities and old initiatives. It's the combination of these that creates the sense of being overwhelmed. First, there's too much to do, and second, the design isn't conducive to getting things done.

### When Less is More

How can company leaders ask managers to focus more effort on building revenue and developing people if they aren't willing to allow managers to back off on some of the past priorities that no longer matter? When companies stop any processes, actions, or behaviors, they provide employees with greater clarity and simplicity of purpose. Not only do they connect the dots for people, the people have *fewer dots to connect*. When people aren't free to eliminate activities that are duplicated, redundant, no longer add value, or are mainly in the way of getting the job done, there's never any relief!

When we've helped Fortune 500 companies to clarify and simplify their strategies so employees can understand where the company is headed, we've discovered that the remnants of old strategies are fundamentally barring companies from successfully launching new initiatives. These old strategies are the equivalent of "organizational cholesterol" that, if left alone, creates a blockage that makes any kind of strenuous new activity impossible. The whack-a-mole way of life continues, and more and more moles keep popping up.



### Designed by "Experts"

Strategy communication is rarely designed with the user in mind. After the 1979 disaster at Three Mile Island, scientists investigated why the control room operators had made such terrible mistakes during the crisis. Amazingly, the findings didn't place the blame with the operators, but with the *design of the control room*. Similarly, when company strategies fail, the fault does not usually lie with disengaged managers charged with implementing the strategy, but with leaders' design for engaging these people in the critical imperatives of the organization's future.

To be clear and understandable, a strategy needs to be simple. But most strategies we create are not simple, because the creators (the strategy makers) have forgotten what it is like not to know. The sentiment of the leaders is often, "We get it, so everybody else should too!" What leaders forget is how long it took them to get it, and why it's necessary to go back to square one in making it simple for managers to translate for their people. This isn't about dumbing down the strategy, but about making it sophisticated, elegant, and brilliantly simple so people can instantly grasp its meaning.

Leaders need to eliminate the feeling of "there's too much to do" and "it's too confusing" that usually result from not actively seeking out and discontinuing old ways of doing business. No one can be meaningfully engaged if they're constantly whacking a herd of moles. 🌱

***The Art of Engagement: Bridging the Gap Between People and Possibilities***, by Jim Haudan, is available for preorder on Amazon.com. Search for Jim Haudan.

# Compass at Anchor Blue – A Perfect Fit!

continued (from page 2)

that change is necessary and desirable, and that they need to own it. Telling people to change just doesn't

*We wanted to create managers who were absolutely stellar at engaging people in our strategy.*

work. But allowing them to discuss views, issues, and information and figure it out for themselves is incredibly powerful and ensures that people internalize the information and take action.

We introduced the workshop to our district managers and senior office managers in a two-day conference in late 2007 and have subsequently started to cascade it to our entire leadership team over several weeks, one module at a time.

Post-conference feedback was incredibly positive, and we've already seen reductions in turnover, more focus from our district managers, and improved execution across the entire business. We anticipate that momentum and results will build as more and more people attend the workshops.

Elaine Gregg is the Senior Vice President, Chief People Officer for Anchor Blue Retail Group, a national retail apparel chain. ✨

continued (from page 1)

Earn it. Every communication, training module, and meeting must pack the most value (from their perspective) and require the least effort possible. Want their time? Earn it. You must be as respectful of every GenYer's time as you are of your most senior executive or your most precious customer.

## Getting Started

### 1. Sense-Making and Meaning-Making Get Serious

Most of us willingly sit through far too much Death by PowerPoint. Work products from skilled visualizers and facilitators like Root Learning, Autodesk, XPlane, and others will be the baseline if you want GenY's attention.

### 2. Training and Development Finally Get User-Centered

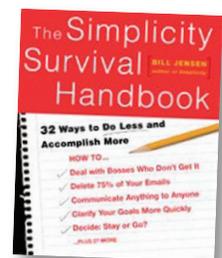
T&D will not go all video-gamey... but it must be extremely personalized to how each person learns. A great example of this is UPS driver training. UPS didn't abandon its 340 "methods." It just changed how it taught them. GenYers are great disbelievers; they needed real-time evidence of right ways and wrong ways before they buy into an instructor's wisdom.

### 3. Practice The Golden Rule

Use other people's time and attention as if they were your own. Do that as if your turnover and retention rates depend on it. Because they do.

One last thing – have fun! Pick three things in your life that exemplify simplicity. I'll guarantee they all bring a smile to your face.

Bill Jensen is CEO of the Jensen Group and expert on work complexity. His best-selling book, *Simplicity*, is based on a two-decade-long study of how work gets done. Email: [bill@simplerwork.com](mailto:bill@simplerwork.com)



# Events and News

*Making the simple complicated  
is commonplace.  
Making the complicated simple,  
awesomely simple – that's creativity.*  
– Charles Mingus

EI Annual Convention and Expo, June 15-17, Toronto, Canada,  
[www.eei.org](http://www.eei.org)

ASTD International Conference & Exposition, June 1-4, San Diego,  
[www.astd2008.org](http://www.astd2008.org)

- Visit Root Learning, booth #128
- See Panda Restaurant Group, eLearning Gallery, Sails Pavilion

SHRM Annual Conference & Exposition, June 22-25, Chicago,  
[www.shrm.org](http://www.shrm.org)

Healthcare Patient Safety Conference, Hilton Chicago, October 2,  
[nhegedus@rootlearning.com](mailto:nhegedus@rootlearning.com) for more details.

Learning 2008, October 26-29, Orlando, [www.learning2008.com](http://www.learning2008.com)

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