

## **SOLVING ACQUISITION CULTURE CLASH**

**The real benefit of a well-run offsite is not what happens during the meetings. It's what happens six months after**

The company had grown aggressively through acquisition and was now the dominant market leader in its industry, with operations spread throughout the United States, Europe, Asia, and South America. Retention was high, revenue was strong, and it was blessed with lots of talented people working hard and wanting to succeed.

But there was one big problem: Operations were a mess. There had been five CEOs in four years. Legacy systems didn't communicate with each other. Cultures were smashing up against one another. Employee engagement scores were at a historical low. And there was confusion about what the core business was and how to grow it.

The interim CEO asked Nancy to design and deliver a two-day offsite focused on team cohesion as well as on clearly identifying core priorities and next steps. Using structured interview methodology, Nancy spoke at length with each senior leader in advance of the off site to identify the undercurrents and unspoken concerns that were dragging the team down--the kind of information that executives know but are often hesitant to share publicly especially with their boss, teams and other critical stakeholders.

Those interviews revealed that functions operated in silos, with little opportunity, means or reason for collaboration. A silo culture had resulted in a lack of knowledge on how to leverage other teams' strengths and information, creating inefficiencies across

the enterprise and legacy systems that didn't speak to each other, as well as duplicated efforts with no tangible results.

That discovery process helped create a customized agenda and a dynamic in which the team could dig more deeply than before and confront the obstacles that were holding them back. There was more shared pain than previously thought, which increased trust and led to tough conversations and better decisions about choosing among conflicting priorities. Facilitated dialogue between Nancy and the leadership team led to renewed alignment on goals, success metrics and next steps.

An additional challenge in this case was a newly hired CEO who unexpectedly joined the group, using the off-site to introduce himself to the team for the first time. Nancy turned that surprise into a value-added experience, coaching the senior leaders to showcase their skills rather than be silenced by the anxiety of proving themselves to a new boss.

The real benefit of a well run offsite is not what happens during the meetings; it's what happens six months after. In this case, the team executed against the priorities they agreed to. Antique systems were jettisoned in favor of more nimble ones suggested at the offsite, and employee engagement scores dramatically increased. Most important, a laser-like focus on key business priorities resulted in increased margins and market share, as well as a reduction in duplicate efforts among functions.

The new CEO saw his group quickly evolve from a confused and dysfunctional collection of individuals into a high-performing team with a common sense of purpose and a new way of communicating amongst themselves.