

OUR FINEST HOUR

“TO EVERY MAN [PERSON] THERE COMES IN HIS LIFETIME THAT SPECIAL MOMENT WHEN HE IS FIGURATIVELY TAPPED ON THE SHOULDER AND OFFERED A CHANCE TO DO A VERY SPECIAL THING, UNIQUE TO HIM AND FITTED TO HIS TALENTS. WHAT A TRAGEDY IF THAT MOMENT FINDS HIM UNPREPARED OR UNQUALIFIED FOR THAT WHICH WOULD BE HIS FINEST HOUR.”

– WINSTON CHURCHILL

The moment is now. History is in the making. Today, every person has an opportunity to do a very special thing – to reshape the way Americans envision national security and enable us to enjoy freedom without fear.

The events of September 11, 2001 started us on this path. The report of the US Senate and House Joint Inquiry into that tragedy stated in part that agencies primarily focused on what remained essentially separate spheres of operation and did not bring together and fully appreciate a range of information. There was not enough time, energy, or resources to fully evaluate all of the incoming information. Significant items of interest were overlooked or deemed not to meet the established thresholds for passing information to other agencies.

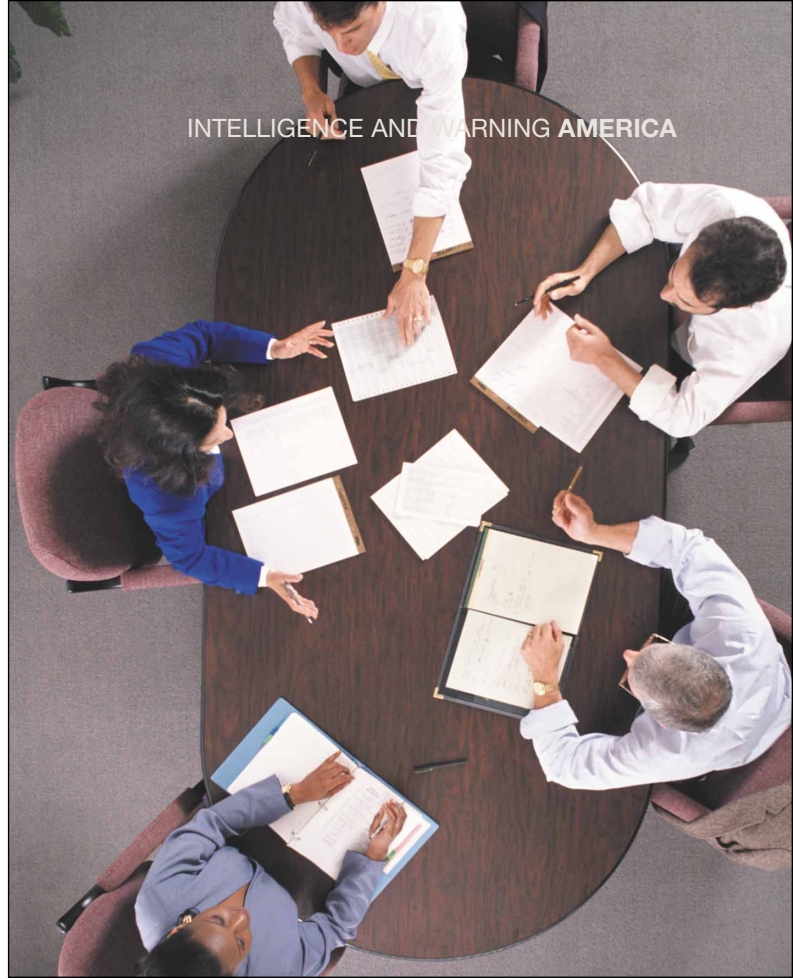
Why did this happen? Perhaps we can glean some insight from Albert Einstein, who said: “You can’t solve a problem with the same mind that created it.” Because our past experiences influence our



by Jo Condrill, President, GoalMinds, Inc.

thinking, we often develop blind spots and become reluctant to value unexpected opportunities. In some cases we might reorganize, hire more people, throw more resources in the mix, declare victory, and wait for the next shoe to fall. But now we’re talking about that “special moment.” You have been figuratively tapped on the shoulder. What will you do?

After 9/11, the President called for a Department of Homeland Security to overcome the weaknesses cited in the Joint Report. He devoted more resources to identifying and eliminating the threats to national security, and he appointed new minds to senior leadership positions within the DHS. With that done, new information



technology systems to enhance or replace existing systems emerged. The question now is: what can bind all these individual elements together to coalesce the separate spheres of operation? We need something like an Airborne Warning and Control System (AWACS) for a more expansive view and sharing of information and ideas. A BrainPower Group can become that AWACS.

Similar to a mastermind group, a BrainPower Group consists of people who are connected by harmony of purpose, open to new ideas, and willing to share their specialized knowledge to achieve the specified purpose. The group moves beyond the interests of a single agency, office, or individual to a higher level, where unanticipated, serendipitous ideas have an opportunity to surface and be accepted. Each person in the group contributes his or her talents in an appropriate way.

Ideally, one such group would be formed at the departmental level. It would include senior leaders in the DHS who have a strategic view and overall responsibility for change. Other groups would be formed within the agencies and offices. The senior leaders could then take the outcomes of their sessions back to their own organizations and have a ready process in place to begin implementation. In this way, BrainPower Groups would generate multi-level creativity and create a force or energy not found in ordinary meetings.

During Desert Storm, the Director of Logistics Plans and Operations at Army headquarters used such a group to wrestle with the challenges of moving mountains of material to the Middle East. He called together a group of personnel from all the military services and selected civilian agencies on a regular basis to raise the level of awareness beyond day-to-day activities. His objective was to form a strategic view of this unprecedented operation, envision future requirements and obstacles, and formulate plans, calling upon the group members' accumulated experience and collective wisdom. After the first few meetings, trust strengthened, the energy level in the room went up, and you could almost feel the group moving en masse to tackle the issues. They changed policies, tweaked systems, and discovered new ways of working together.

Forming a BrainPower Group is as easy as doing the Texas two-step. Many entrepreneurs and small business owners form or join such groups to expand their vision, share specialized knowledge, and hold themselves accountable for following through on their plans. Group members gather at regular intervals in person, via teleconferencing, or internet chat sessions to present their issues, brainstorm ideas, share knowledge, and help each other find the tools to achieve their objectives. I've seen at least one executive development group hold meetings of the minds across the nation using a conference call.

The ability to communicate effectively with people from various disciplines and offices is as essential as breathing. When you add the challenge of cross-cultural communication, age differences, and gender preferences, you get a better grasp of why effective communication is so difficult! Many of us fail to get our messages across clearly. But the best way to be a good communicator is to be a good listener. As John Locke said: "I attribute the little I know to

my not having been ashamed to ask for information, and to my rule of conversing with all descriptions of men on those topics that form their own peculiar professions and pursuits."

Group members have their own agency focus and may well also have very different skills, expertise and temperament. The common element is that each person brings into the group specialized knowledge, such as intelligence gathering, information technology, or interpretation and analysis. Everyone has something to contribute and everyone has something to gain from the shared experience. Understanding the connectivity and importance of information allows members to make better judgments and adopt better policies.

Experience has shown that members of BrainPower Groups develop a mutual trust that becomes stronger over time. This allows them to divulge weaknesses as well as strengths in an environment of confidentiality and harmony. Then, the group's collective energy and imagination can kick-start individual effort.

With a new mindset, innovative thinking, and a team of people dedicated to BrainPower Groups, we can more effectively work together to eliminate any blind spots that may have challenged us in the past. So, now that your shoulder has been tapped, what will you do? Think carefully and innovatively. This could be your finest hour. ■

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