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by sheryl crowe



## The Western Glove Works Experience

By: James Ladd  
Life & Business Coach



### INTRODUCTION

In June of 2010, I embarked upon what proved to be the most positive and rewarding team building experience of my long career – first as an Organizational Development Specialist and most recently, and for the past seven years, as a Personal Coach.

Following a series of preliminary meetings with the senior management group of Western Glove, we agreed that I would coach a select group of operations managers both individually and as a team. We created a letter of understanding, outlining the specific details surrounding this team building initiative.

The purpose of the initiative came out of a perceived need for improved communication between managers in the operations departments. All of them are dependent upon one another for the ultimate flow and completion of a quality product in a timely manner for distribution into the marketplace:

#### MY MISSION

To facilitate a process leading to improved communications and working relationships between the various operation department managers and their staff, in order to facilitate an overall improvement in the timing, flow and smooth transition of work through the various stages of production.

### WHO IS WESTERN GLOVE?

Western Glove Works is a Canadian partnership and a leader in the design, development and marketing of denim and related apparel products. Western has developed a large sales and distribution network across North America and in select international markets, primarily the European Union ("EU"). Western sells their apparel products through various retail chains such as Below the Belt, Bootlegger, and Jean Machine in Canada. In the USA, they sell through Maurices, The Buckle, plus national department stores such as Nordstrom, Dillard's, Bon Ton, Macy's, and Bloomingdales. Western makes its sales in the EU through distributors in the UK, Germany, and most recently, Russia.

Western was founded in 1921 by the grandfather and great uncles of Bob and Michael Silver, President of Western Glove Works and Silver Jeans Co., respectively. The company started as a garment factory to produce leather gloves and work wear. Western Glove has grown exponentially over the years. They have experienced a number of transformations during that time, from manufacturing polyester knitwear and casual wear, which includes work wear jeans, to producing exclusively jeans, including private label jeans for companies such as Marks and Spencer, the Gap, Hudson's Bay Company, and Marks Work Warehouse. In 1991, Western started its own line of jeans with the brand name of "SILVER JEANS."

In 1981, together with partners Ron and Norm Stern, Bob and Michael Silver purchased the company from Bob and Michael's mother and their great uncle. At that time, the company's gross annual sales were \$11 million. In 2003, Western Glove made a significant shift in the way it conducted business. They changed from a manufacturing company to a design, product development, and marketing company that outsourced most of its manufacturing to Asia.

Few companies in the North American apparel industry can trace their roots back to 1921, and fewer still can claim consistent operating profitability since that time. Western is a truly unique company with not only a fascinating history of growth, but a bright future ahead as it grows into the 21st century. Today Western Glove Works boasts gross annual sales of approximately \$150 million.



**Administration Team**

## **SECOND TEAM**

Before I detail how the process worked with the operations managers, I must mention that the results with the first team were turning out to be so positive, that Western asked me to begin working with their six-member administration team, as well. My work with this team began in January of 2011. We followed the same process, with very similar outcomes when we concluded in July. The essential difference between the two teams was in the way each of them communicated. My recommendations for the second team were essentially the same as for the first team.

## **TESTIMONIAL**

Things happen for a reason. I met Jim in the spring of 2010 because of a chance conversation my wife and I had with Jim's daughter, a server at 529 Wellington. It turns out that Jim and I have something in common—we both are double lung transplant recipients. A business card left with Jim's daughter Marnie resulted in a phone call from Jim a few weeks later followed by a lunch—during which we traded our transplant stories.

A subsequent lunch resulted in our discussing what we both did for a living and Jim's life and business coaching career intrigued me greatly in terms of the opportunity I felt it presented for Western Glove. Following that meeting, I asked Jim to meet with Michael Silver and me at our offices. Michael shared my excitement and enthusiasm to begin this team coaching "experiment", which was clearly outside the box in terms of the approach that Jim proposed—a key element of which is to assist individuals to reach their full potential within the context of aligning the individual's personal goals and objectives with those of the organization. The next step was to meet with members of the operational team to gauge their interest in embarking on this project. When Jim met with the initial team to describe the process that he would undertake with them, the enthusiasm in the meeting room was palpable. The rest as they say is now history. The results for the first group were outstanding which then led me to invite our VP Finance to form another team that would undergo the same process and hopefully, transformation. I am very happy to say that I am delighted with the outcome of Jim's and my chance meeting, both for our organization and me personally.

Thanks Jim for your contribution towards making Western an even better company.  
**Scott Merrell, COO and CFO, Western Glove Works**

## **THE PROCESS**

Following an introductory session with the operational management team, we arranged a schedule of individual one-hour sessions. These sessions began in June 2010 and ran "concurrently" over seven months, culminating just prior to Christmas.

Individual coaching sessions are typically completed in four to five months, but in this



**Operations & Administration Team  
(Me on Lower Left)**

case, because of travel and summer vacations, the process extended over seven months.

In coaching each individual, I used my unique and highly effective "Seven Step Process". It includes each manager receiving a copy of *The Personal Transformation Guide*, which supports the seven step coaching process.

The Process is actually a strategically directed series of seven questions that requires the client to closely examine various aspects of their personal and professional lives. Based upon what they come to know, understand, and conclude about what they need to do to improve upon or actually change, they then prepare a series of goals. They also prepare a strategic action plan, which details how they will achieve those goals. All this leads to the desired outcomes.

The process breaks down into two sections. The first asks three questions intended to heighten, broaden, and deepen self-awareness and understanding of self. This part of the coaching process is fully supported with a number of personal assessment tools, activities, and questions – all these, along with a dialogue between coach and client, contribute to bringing about the desired awareness.

The final four questions are designed to bring about the ACTION that was created through awareness in the first part of the process. In answering these questions, the client is able to strategically formulate a number of goals, along with supporting action plans to achieve them.

The major objective for me behind the entire process is to bring a person into a closer alignment or congruence with the fundamental nature of who they are in the world. This must and always includes both their personal and professional lives.

## **TEAM WORK**

Because the overriding mission of this initiative was better communications and working relationships, naturally a requirement for all members of the team was to get to know, not just themselves, but one another. We accomplished this through scheduling three highly experiential team building sessions.

### **Personality Styles**

The Personality Workshop served to reinforce the individual work done in this area even further. It was a half-day exercise that gave the team members additional information about the characteristics of the various communication styles, how to recognize their own styles of communication in more detail, and how to better recognize the communication styles of the other team members. They were able to communicate more effectively with one another, making their interpersonal relationships much more fulfilling and enjoyable.

### **Value Cards**

The Value Cards process ran for a half-day. It consisted of a series of structured activities designed to help team members analyze and share their views on various work-related values that help or hinder effective team functioning. Establishing values is a critical early activity for any new team. The values that the team members decide to adopt will help them lay

the foundation and overall strategy to achieve their mission, goals and objectives. It also helps lay the foundation for the processes and procedures they employ, and the ways in which they interact with one another and with people outside the team.

### **Twelve Angry Men**

Twelve Angry Men was a one-day session designed to explore the basic dynamics of group problem solving and to examine some of the common pitfalls characterizing groups that perform poorly. More importantly, a fail-safe alternative to such pitfalls was presented in the form of an in-depth blueprint for managing Commitment, Conflict, Creativity, and Consensus - the "Four Cs" of creative group problem solving. Through several structured exercises and feedback sessions, managers had an opportunity to experience some of these dynamics personally, and to analyze their own contributions to group and team functioning through the utilization of The Johari Window assessment.

### **RESULTS**

Reflecting back over our work together, both individually and in a team setting, I can say with certainty that everyone involved engaged fully and participated wholeheartedly throughout the entire process – and everyone realized positive outcomes. Their willingness to take responsibility, to tell themselves and each other the truth, demonstrated a remarkable level of trust and courage, which resulted in outstanding results for each team member, the team, and the organization as a whole.

Specifically, communications and interpersonal relationships improved substantially between the various department managers and their departments because of a greater sensitivity they now showed to the various style and value differences. Through heightened self-awareness, a greater appreciation and respect for the different ways we all communicate, plus the chance to try out some of that learning through a variety of team building exercises, proved to be

invaluable learning with an immediate application back in the workplace. As well, each member of the team had an opportunity to set realistic, attainable goals and create action plans, which were congruent with what they had come to know about themselves and with the organizations values, goals and objectives.

#### **TESTIMONIAL**

I personally really enjoyed getting to know Jim and reinforcing some things I knew about myself. It has been so valuable learning more about my colleagues and looking at how our personality styles can work well together or, at times, cause conflict. I know I'll continue to look at the goals I've set and whether I'm making progress towards accomplishing them. Because of my main personality styles, I can sometimes "get stuck" in making decisions and I'm much better at recognizing this now and doing something about it.

Our individual and team work with Jim has had such a positive impact on the entire Management group and how the company functions. We are more focused on bringing all the diverse areas of the company together to reach our common goals. I have seen great improvements in the interactions between individuals and departments who did not previously work as well together and sometimes did not acknowledge each other. WGW started this project with an operational group and then expanded to include a group of Administrative or support service staff, which I oversee. While these groups are not traditional teams, I see them all working so well together and also approaching their own staff differently. It is true that you get out of it what you're willing to put in because those who really embraced the process and have applied many of Jim's suggestions are really seeing the benefits. Now, when we encounter difficult situations, it is often suggested that perhaps we need to get Jim involved or expand the number of employees who should go through the personal transformation guide with him. What Jim has led us through is actually influencing our Corporate Culture for the better! Jim's approach has helped us recognize that encouraging our employees to develop themselves personally and professionally is a good investment.

**Christina Love, CA, Vice President Finance,  
Western Glove Works**



**Operations Team**

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

Both teams experienced a considerable amount of personal and professional growth through the process. They began to show a greater appreciation and sensitivity toward personality and value differences in their communications, both individually and together in their teams. Given that research clearly indicates that a direct correlation exists between one's level of emotional intelligence and their success in the workplace, there was nothing left to do. It became clear that they were all ready to take it to the next level and come together to enhance and build their emotional intelligence over time. Therefore, I recommended:

A continuing effort be made to enhance and improve the emotional intelligence of the team members. To be specific, this would be a series of ½ day and full day workshops, spread over the next couple of years. These workshops would provide opportunities to identify areas to work on to specifically enhance, practice, and improve their EQ skills in ways that would reinforce and further enhance their learning.

## **UNIQUENESS OF THIS APPROACH**

Upon reflection, there were a number of reasons for the effectiveness of this team building initiative at Western Glove:

1. First, it had to do with the approach, which, unlike traditional team building, focused first on individual team member growth before addressing the team as a whole.
2. The overwhelming support and confidence of senior management in the process.
3. Senior management's wholehearted support of their participating managers.
4. The positive workplace climate that existed when I came to Western Glove.
5. And finally, and most importantly, a group of dedicated, trusting, and courageous managers who embraced my 'unique' and non-traditional approach to team building with a determination to grow.

## **TESTIMONIAL**

Life and Business Coaching was definitely a very worthwhile venture for our organization and all the participants who joined in the six-month journey that has helped all of us as individuals and as members of the Sr. Management Group at Western Glove Works.

For many I am sure it starts with reluctance to share and explore but as each week goes by and with some gentle pushing and encouragement from Coach Ladd, you start to learn and understand more about yourself and your style. Once you understand your own strengths and weaknesses it makes it much easier to see how the different characteristic styles interact and what changes might be required in your approach with family, friends and colleagues to build better relationships.

Upon completion of the group work, I continued on with Coach Ladd to further explore Emotional Intelligence or EQ, which was a natural progression from the process of "Slaying the Dragon," as it further explored self-awareness, self-management and social awareness and the role they play in relationship management, which is really the key to building strong teams and families.

It was a great experience, and I believe the mission statement I established and information I gained through the program will be used in everything I do for years to come.

Thanks for your support and encouragement throughout the entire process.  
**Mark Lamont Vice President Apparel Services, Silver Jeans Co. Western Glove Works**

## ADDITIONAL TESTIMONIALS

"At first I was very apprehensive about sharing my personal thoughts about my career and home life with anyone, nevertheless a complete stranger. However it did not take long to open up and share with Jim as he seemed to be like an old friend you could trust....and a good listener. He certainly helped me look at my colleagues from a different perspective, that being their personality type and their approach to problem solving and communication. From a personal standpoint, Jim helped me prioritize things in my life and communicate and plan goals together with my family. I can't imagine anyone who could not benefit from Jim's life coaching!" **Ron Loewen (Western Glove Works)**

"I have been with the company for over 30 years, I have attended several management seminars but my experience with Coach Ladd helped me a lot for my self-assessment and understanding of other people's styles of management. I was very excited to know through my meetings with Coach Ladd, what my personal style is, values and interest and learned that they are all congruent with each other. I guess we all know this but was never magnified in this capacity. I have learned to adjust tolerance in every aspect of my professional and personal life and use my ability to be more effective and productive with my group.

Coach Ladd has a very unique style of coaching. His sharing some of his own life and career experiences has created a motivational nature for me and helped me make decisions and set goals that are right for me personally and professionally.

Thank you very much coach!"  
**Evelyn Agagnier (Director Quality Assurance, WGW)**

I thought our individual sessions and team meetings were very beneficial.

It really gave me a different perspective on a lot of things and put me in a position where I consistently reflect on not only my actions, but the reactions of others.

Learning about the different personality types was very helpful in dealing with various types of personalities in both my personal and professional life.

Overall, it was a great experience!  
**Sheila (Western Glove)**

I have a better understanding and acceptance of myself, the reasons I do things, and how I approach life. I now understand and have more respect for others by understanding their personality types. I have been successful in flexing my style to maximize productivity in the work place. I find that flexing my style to appeal to others has allowed for many of my ideas to be understood and adopted more easily. I have also moved forward with my goals by moving outside my comfort zone and become more active in speaking to sales and to be a key contributor in presentations. This has been noticed my Upper Management and complimented on.

One of the most significant things that I have been able to adopt is to not hold onto things anymore. I now am able to address a difficult issue and talk about how I am feeling to arrive at a consensus. I no longer take the issues home and dwell on things that I can not control. I have learnt to not be as hard on myself and to understand that the world will not end if something is not perfect. I still have work to do on the various goals that I have set for myself but I am keeping up with many such as speaking to my family weekly and have booked a trip to Italy with my mother.

**Janice Marks (Western Glove Works)**

I found Jim Ladd's "Slaying the Dragon" course allowed me to sit back, take stock of my life and ensure that I was going down the right path for me both personally and professionally. It is so easy to get caught up in our fast paced and fast moving world that we go through our life just doing. Coach Ladd's course provides you with the tools to assess your life and allows you to create your own path to follow to achieve your goals.

The group sessions were very helpful in creating synergy within the workplace. The workshops allow you to learn about how your co-worker's perceive you and provides ideas as to how to create a better and more productive working environment.

I truly enjoyed Coach Ladd's course and enjoyed working with him to help me direct myself back onto my path down life's road.

**Annette (Western Glove)**

James Ladd coaching sessions have been one of the most positive and significant experiences in my life. Everyone should have a Life coach!

**Debbie Mazur**