

## Intranet teams: a leadership and coaching role

The goal of an intranet team is to ensure that the intranet is effective, up-to-date and usable. This has not proved easy to achieve, and many teams have relied on setting policies or standards and attempting to enforce them across the business.

This 'big stick' approach hasn't worked in most cases. Instead, the intranet team often becomes viewed as a gatekeeper or bottleneck that does little more than say 'no' to business units. The business then reacts by rebelling against this centralised control, or simply working around the intranet team.

There is a better way.

Intranet teams should instead look to playing a *leadership* and *coaching* role in the organisation. These two approaches provide a range of techniques for encouraging organisational change and supporting staff activities.

### Leadership

Effective leadership is all about creating a *shared vision*, and making it a reality. This is not just making decisions and enforcing them. Instead, note the emphasis on *shared* vision: true leadership engages the interest and motivation of those who are responsible for implementing the approach.

Too often, intranet teams are trapped in a maintenance role, without the mandate to guide the future direction of the intranet.

While in part this may be due to a lack of senior management sponsorship (see the article *Choosing an intranet project sponsor*), the intranet team must also demonstrate that they have sufficient vision to make the intranet a success.

Ask yourself this question: "If cornered in a lift, can I explain what the intranet is *for*, in 30 seconds?". More than just a repository for content or publishing platform, the intranet must play a strategic role in helping to meet broader organisational goals.

Start by identifying needs and defining goals, and then engage senior management in the process of leading the intranet into the future.

For more on setting effective intranet goals, see the article '*Beyond efficient dissemination of timely information*'.

### Coaching

Coaching is the process of working *with* people to help them achieve their goals. Pick up any recent management book, and you will see coaching placed as one of the central skills for the modern manager.

In the context of an intranet team, coaching skills are most useful when working with business groups and content owners.

By playing a coaching role, the intranet team can work *constructively* with authors to help them identify the best way to write, structure and publish their material.

This is more than just wishful thinking. In practice, organisations who have taken this approach have discovered that business units just want to make their lives as easy as possible. If the intranet team is able to help them with the difficult issues (such as usability and information architecture aspects), then they are very happy.

This coaching approach then sees the intranet team positioned as a service group, with the skills and knowledge required to help the business achieve its goals.

### New skills

With many intranet teams coming from a technical or web design background, the challenge is to gain the skills required to play this leadership and coaching role.

These two approaches are very much built on 'people skills', and in many organisations, there are limited opportunities to receive training in these areas.

There are a number of excellent books (see below), and professional training courses. Also consider bringing in an external *mentor* to assist with evolving the role of the intranet team.

### Further reading

Two very small books are strongly recommended as a starting point for those interested in learning more about leadership and coaching techniques:

Max Landsberg, *Tao of Coaching*

Max Landsberg, *The Tools of Leadership*