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**Module**

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**Uncommon Knowledge**

**What It Is**

Truth is stranger than fiction, but it is because fiction is obliged to stick to possibilities. Truth isn't.

—Mark Twain

One of the primary differences between group think and GroupGenius is that the latter invites – even requires – a wide range of diverse viewpoints. Humans are inherently social. In a group, people quickly work out what they think are the prevailing opinions of the group and are often reluctant to share different views, including the very possibility of positive change if things look bleak.

This tool builds on little known information in the group to overcome pessimism/cynicism regarding the possibility that difficult conditions can change for the better. The “common knowledge” that the situation is hopeless is challenged by the “uncommon knowledge” that participants possess regarding glimmers of hope or possibility.

**What to Use It For**

- Sharing little-known good news about what is already exists and is working toward the good amid difficult conditions.
- Bringing a sense of possibility and realistic optimism into the energetic field of a group.

**How It Works**

Step 1. If the group is small enough — 20 or fewer — you can do this as a large group exercise. Otherwise, you can conduct the exercise in **Kotter Groups** or in normal breakout groups.

Step 2. In any event, deliver the simple instructions verbally and use your own positive energy to set the stage for participants. You might say something like the following:

“Conventional wisdom — common knowledge — is that the situation is bleak, even hopeless. Some people might even question why we are wasting our time investing our time and energy in something that has been so bad for so long and does not show signs of turning around anytime soon.

“Yet here we are. I wonder if we might have information that is not part of the common understanding of what is going on here. Let’s call this *uncommon knowledge*.

“Take a few minutes to review what you, personally know about the situation that give you

a glimmer of hope. Are there events or actions that most people do not know about — but you do — that show signs of movement in a positive direction? Maybe you can identify several but take a few moments in silence to review them and pick the one that is most striking or important in your opinion. You can take some notes if you would like and then we are going to go around the group to see what each of us has come up with.

“When you have identified one of these bits of *uncommon knowledge* catch my eye and nod so I know we can move on.”

Step 3. Give the group two or three minutes to reflect in silence. Scan the group and when a participant catches your eye, nod and say “Thank you.” This will encourage others to keep at it until everyone has something to share. Tell the large group when they have “about a minute” left.

Step 4. Reports

a. Small Group of 20 or fewer:

- 1) Ask for a volunteer to start and go around the group.
- 2) Make it clear that it is okay to pass if a person has not come up with something to share.

b. Kotter Groups:

- 1) If you are working in Kotter Groups, invite people to share their uncommon knowledge in their group.
- 2) Give them 8 to 10 minutes for sharing.
- 3) Then ask them to select **one** of the bits of uncommon knowledge to report out to the larger group.
- 4) Facilitate this sharing until each group has given one item.

Step 5. Dialogue: You can expect that this exercise will spark conversation. These questions may help you deepen the dialogue:

- What are the patterns or similarities in what you just heard?
- How do you explain the fact that this uncommon knowledge is not more widely known?
- Based on what you heard, what opens for you personally?

**Timing**

Introduction – 5 minutes  
 Moving into Kotter Groups – 3-4 minutes  
 Individual work – 3-4 minutes  
 Kotter Group sharing – 8-10 minutes  
 Selecting one item to share from Kotter Groups – 3 minutes  
 Reporting to the large group – 2 minutes per Kotter Group  
 Dialogue – 5-15 minutes

**Keep in Mind**

- Whenever possible, have a scribe or graphic recorder capture this uncommon knowledge on a large piece of foam board so you can display it and draw inspiration from it for the rest of your session.
- The following resources are helpful background for this build-on-what-is-working approach:
  - David L. Cooperrider and Diana Whitney, *Appreciative Inquiry: A Positive revolution for Change*
  - Paul Z. Jackson and Mark McKergow, *The Solution Focus: Making Coaching and Change SIMPLE*
- You can build on this general idea using **Force Field Analysis**. The uncommon knowledge items are examples of Driving Forces moving the situation in the direction you would like. You can certainly add more widely recognized Driving Forces. Then you would also brainstorm the Resisting or Restraining Forces and select some of these to concentrate on as tool directs.