



## >> Suggestions

"If you actually read this, I suggest you pull your head out of your %\$@#!"

This suggestion is not just a vulgar taunt to solicit readers. It frequently is found as bold script hiding in the dark void of the company suggestion box.

Some states require formal programs to document methods available for employees to communicate with management. A common tool used to satisfy these requirements is the company suggestion program. Suggestion programs can be great tools for enabling communication between the people closest to an organization's problems (a.k.a. opportunities) and the people responsible for managing those opportunities. However, suggestion programs also can degrade culture if implemented as compliance mechanisms and not as genuine efforts to achieve meaningful communication and organizational improvement.

The key to successful risk control is honest, timely and effective communication. For this reason, I begin risk assessments with a review of programs designed to facilitate communication. I usually start by evaluating the organization's

suggestion program for the candor of the dialog, timeliness of closing

the communication loop and effectiveness of the program in achieving demonstrable improvements. This process quickly helps to determine the nature and tone of an organization's risk control effort.

Suggestion programs can resemble a game of "Hot Potato." "Um, John gets them out of the box and gives them to Jane, who types them up and sends them to Joe. I'm not sure if anybody tracks them other than Jane when she types the list. Sometimes we get suggestions like 'Pull your head out of your %\$@#!' and we wouldn't want to track those." My suggestion: "Track those!"

Many suggestion programs fail to track historical submissions, especially if they're anonymous (read: juicy, passionate, real). Many more fail to track the status of follow-through, the person accountable for addressing the suggestion, the date the suggestion was submitted, the date it was acknowledged and/or resolved and the resolution delay. Great suggestion programs automatically time and date stamp submissions, disallow deletions, simplify the tracking and reporting of implementation status and enable unrestricted sharing of the underlying ideas.

George Bernard Shaw understood the power of ideas when he suggested, "If you have an apple and I have an apple and we exchange these apples, then you and I will still each have one apple. But if you have an idea and I have an idea and we exchange these ideas, then each of us will have two ideas."

### THE SUGGESTION MODULE

Active Agenda's Suggestion module was designed to capture and share ideas by reducing the physical, political and technical barriers to communication. The module can enable a warehouse employee in Greenfield, Iowa, to impact the operations of a sister plant in Griffith, NSW, Australia, with the click of a mouse. After all, barriers in Greenfield should not be allowed to slow progress in Griffith. Moreover, progress in Griffith should be allowed to inspire people in Greenfield.

The module collects ideas in a central repository that can be analyzed by anyone with the appropriate access credentials. Suggestions can be filtered by a wide variety of parameters and can be monitored by decentralized operations managers as a preemptive tool and/or centralized process improvement leaders. Centralized suggestion statistics can be displayed on monitors attached to break room walls across the enterprise and the data will appear as soon as new suggestions are entered.

**Caution:** Before rushing out to buy those flat screens for the break room, know that suggestions often imply the presence of problems. Organizations embracing "problems first" are perfect candidates for the robust capabilities of this module, while organizations less comfortable with problem sharing can use the module under strict password control and transition to greater levels of transparency over time. Both approaches will require proactive promotion, collection and analysis of suggestions to avoid the dreaded script cited above.

### WHAT GETS MEASURED

The Suggestion module enables the measurement of communication frequency, idea flow and problem solving effectiveness. Charts and reports can be generated to reveal the quantity of communication and quality of the process from opportunity, to suggestion, to implementation. Module data also can be used to reveal cultural differences between operating locations. It should be no surprise that most suggestions emanate from the employees of proactive supervisors and managers.

### WHAT GETS DONE

Ideas get captured, tracked, shared and adopted across an enterprise. Ideas are scaled and problems solved! **EHS**

#### This Month's Links:

**Demo:** [demo.activeagenda.net/list.php?mdl=sgg](http://demo.activeagenda.net/list.php?mdl=sgg)

**Forum:** [activeagenda.net/discussions/viewforum.php?f=69](http://activeagenda.net/discussions/viewforum.php?f=69)

**Wiki:** [activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Suggestions\\_Module](http://activeagenda.net/documentation/index.php?title=Suggestions_Module)



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