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## Leadership In-Sight: monthly musings about leading, managing and minding your business

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### Anticipate Potential Problems by Networking

Recently a Leaders Path coaching client (let's call him Tim) and I sat down to look at how he was handling the unexpected. We developed the following process that I will share with you.

First we talked about his ability to cope with problems as they occur. Then we explored ways to turn his attention to anticipating the unexpected. One of the best avenues through which he could pick up clues regarding changes is via the communication network in his (and your) organization. If you increase your detection of early warning signals, you will be prepared for and be aware of problems. The following is a list of steps you can take:

1. Be alert to all reliable information in your assigned roles and areas of responsibility, especially in conversations that appear off-the-cuff or casual. For instance, you might hear about a staffing problem in one of the service groups you depend on. Or you might discover that the company has signed a large contract that, although unrelated to your area, will use some of the same facilities you are using.
2. Keep track of all potential red flag issues that you see on emails, reports or other correspondence. For example, policy changes and/or organizational shifts should always be analyzed for potential impact on your area of responsibility.
3. Keep track of what you hear or read and the sources. Your record of potential problems will help you anticipate circumstances that can be controlled and prepare for those outside of your control.

### Manage Risk

It is important to identify and anticipate potential problems so you can take any corrective action. One way Tim is working on preparing for the unexpected is to identify risk during work planning stages. Over the next 3 months each time he begins to work on a project or task, he will do the following:

1. Prepare a breakdown of all the functional tasks involved.
2. Analyze each of these to determine any areas of risk. For instance, data necessary for effective work planning might be missing. The project might involve a new procedure. Perhaps one of the support groups he depends upon is experiencing staffing problems. He will try to think of everything that might go wrong.
3. He categorizes these into high, medium and low risks.
4. Then he generates several possible approaches to these problems. He plans to explore all the trade-offs and alternatives in choosing the best approaches. We then discuss potential pitfalls, problems, possibilities and probabilities.
5. The next step is to implement safety factors into the planning for high risk areas. For example, perhaps more time and/or funds should be allocated into these areas. Time is making an effort to keep informed while he is working on high risk areas either observation, reports and networking.
6. If one of his identified risks blossoms into a full blown development, he can turn to his strategies and determine which one should be implemented. Tim will test the action plan with me and a technical group inside his company.

Mastering these approaches will help reduce the number and frequency of on the job problems for which you are unprepared and increase the number of instances which you are successful in anticipating

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