

TrendSpotters: Improving Performance – It isn't magic, it's science

By Carol Haig, CPT, Roger Addison, CPT, EdD, Lynn Kearny, CPT

On October 29, 2008 ISPI and the business world lost one of Performance Improvement's finest contributors. A man who tirelessly searched for better solutions to the challenges companies face, Geary Rummler, <http://www.performance.designlab.com/index.asp> shared his expertise with clients and colleagues, contributed insightful articles and books, for more information see **Serious Performance Consulting** by Geary Rummler, gave presentations and workshops, and actively engaged with ISPI.

Like many of you, we were influenced by Geary's work and enjoyed his friendship of many years. Without his relentless encouragement, our book, *Performance Architecture – The Art and Science of Improving Organizations*, probably would not exist. As we look ahead to publication by Pfeiffer in April 2009, we'd like to share with you our remembrances of the book's conception in the summer of 2006 with Geary in the unlikely role of midwife.

Inspiration in the Desert

Have you been to Arizona in July? There is a reason why many residents leave that fine state in the summer and why numbers of businesses close for the season, sensibly re-opening when the temperatures descend to more comfortable levels. Geary, however, loved the Southwest in all seasons. He and his wife, Margaret, built a wonderful home and office in the Tucson hills. We journeyed there for an intense working weekend because Geary said, "Come to Tucson and I will take you through a process to design your book. And you won't leave until we have an outline."

Lynn Kearny, who joins us at TrendSpotters Central for this special column, shares her impressions of our arrival at the Rummler compound:

I am struck by the art and architecture of the place. There is a courtyard with interesting desert plants, the glass wall of the house on our left, and the adobe walls of the office on our right. Two alert and handsome cats regard us from behind the glass wall. Some of the courtyard's adobe walls are painted strong desert-country colors: pumpkin, purple, and around the corner one that's chartreuse. A few pieces of handsome metal sculpture hang on walls, and there is a ramada shading a fireplace and comfortable patio furniture. Grouped around the courtyard are large, sculptural barrel cactuses in tones of green and yellow.

The office is a separate adobe building with its own big room, and a wonderful art collection. This is the room where we will work with Geary as our host, sponsor, and facilitator. There is a huge table, long and wide enough for at least 10 people to work comfortably. There is a larger than life sized painting of a Native American, a stunning buffalo, and a wonderful painting of a wolf with a calligraphic poem worked into the painting. I think this is Geary's wolf; it shares something in spirit and independence with him.

Geary does not lead the meeting so much as help us keep moving forward, offering us free use of his materials, and chiming in only when asked or when we are floundering. He listens intently, then drifts to the side to work briefly on his business, then drifts back. We are energized, encouraged, and focused just by having him there. I want him back.



From Concept to Completion

With our three laptops on the job, flip charts on the walls, materials everywhere, and the four of us around that table, Geary kept his promise. When we look now at our original plan and the outlines we developed for each chapter during those sweltering days, we see the bare roots of a project systematically fed ideas and concepts, then supported by changes and enhancements as we wrote to those outlines to ultimately produce a finished manuscript.

Here are some of our original ideas that stayed in play as we wrote the book:

- The Performance Technology Landscape for more information see Landscape article by Roger Addison is the foundation for the book
- Approach performance improvement by exploring how to do it at each of the three levels of organizations: worker, work, workplace
- Include a running case study, to illustrate the concepts and models offered
- Write directly to the reader, from our experiences and those of colleagues and friends
- Include lots of stories to illustrate how to do performance improvement
- Share models and tools we have used and that we know are effective
- Include Lynn's illustrations to help complicated models and concepts come alive
- Write each chapter so that it can stand alone, and invite the reader to read the chapters in any order

Links to the Performance Technology Landscape

Regular readers of TrendSpotters know that we always show how the featured model or tool supports the principles of Performance Technology. In his work, Geary epitomized these principles in action:

- R** Focus on **Results** – Geary always started by identifying the results
- S** Take a **System** view – If you know anything about Geary, you know that his models and his approach were always systems driven
- V** Add **Value** – Geary was scrupulous about measuring the results of his work
- P** Establish **Partnerships** – Geary was a partner to ISPI, to his colleagues, and to his clients

At the End of the Day

Lynn's impressions round out our days in the desert:

In the mornings and throughout the day there are coffee, sandwiches, wonderful art, and great views of the surrounding landscape. We have arrived just after an unusual period of heavy rain, and Tucson is hot and humid. The desert there is completely different from the desert we're used to in New Mexico or California, which have sparse growth.

Every square foot of the Sonoran desert is home to at least a dozen plants and animals. There are cacti, creosote and sage, grasses, and plants I can't identify. Most of the saguaro cacti have bloomed and are fruiting - the fruit that crown the tall head and arms of the saguaro are fermenting in the sun. Local doves are eating them and getting drunk - we hear them cooing and giggling every time we go outside. Small troops of quail run across the roads everywhere.

At the end of the day when we have wound down, Geary and Margaret take us out to a local restaurant for good food, wine, and conversation. As the evening comes on, the mountains darken and turn deep purple, reaching out with shadows. Behind them the sunset goes from rose and gold to scarlet, orange and fuchsia.

It's hard to realize that Geary is gone. However, his work and his influence are very much alive. And as Geary reminds us



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