

# Drawing on Leadership

Craig Chappelow

**B**efore CCL and Jossey-Bass joined efforts to produce *Leadership in Action*, CCL published a precursor called *Issues & Observations*. Even though it was printed on rough beige stock and was very basic compared with *LiA*, I was a big fan of *I&O*. It featured summaries of seminal CCL research as well as the best thinking of CCL staff members and outside authors on the subjects of leadership and creativity, and I would usually read it cover to cover. But I must confess that I picked it up first for the pictures. The articles in *I&O* were usually illustrated by a gifted cartoonist, David Hills.

David passed away in March of 2007, at age seventy-six, and his lasting impact on CCL goes far beyond his accomplished cartooning. David, who held a Ph.D. degree in clinical psychology from the University of Iowa and had been a professor at Wake Forest University, was originally brought into CCL in the late 1970s to evaluate research content and the statistical rigor of CCL's leadership assessment methods.

## PICTURING INNOVATION

To learn more about David's role in CCL's formative years, I spoke with Stan Gryskiewicz, currently president of Positive Turbulence LLC. Stan was a graduate student of David's and later became one of CCL's most notable experts on the subject of creativity, retiring in 2005 as vice presi-



dent of global resources and senior fellow, creativity and innovation. From 1978 through 1987, Stan managed an annual conference called Creativity Week, during which practitioners of innovation reviewed and explored the promising frontiers in the field. The goal of the week was to bring old and new contributors to a small, collegial setting and provide them with a challenging, participative audience. Participants included college professors, organizational research and development staffers, scientists, experts in artificial intelligence, and other thought leaders from around the world.

It was during one such Creativity Week that David's cartooning ability inadvertently became a part of CCL's fabric. Attending as a program participant, David took a seat in the back of the room and began drawing furiously. At the end of the day he displayed ten cartoons that summed up

the day's discussions. The audience broke into applause. These cartoons promptly became a welcome and always applauded feature of Creativity Week, and David's drawings began showing up in CCL publications.

"David's gift was to take a complicated concept and draw a cartoon that communicated the crux of the message," says Stan. "His talent generated deep reflection and learning by asking those involved to step back and think about the greater implications of what was said."

An outgrowth of Creativity Week, the Association for Managers of Innovation (AMI) was conceived as an invitational network of innovation practitioners. AMI's initial meeting, in 1981, drew six members. By 1986, the group had grown to twenty. Since then, attendance at the twice-yearly meetings has averaged twenty-five to thirty. *Fast Company* has spotlighted AMI in its "The Meeting I Never Miss" feature.



EXTERNAL THREAT CAN  
INCREASE GROUP COHESION

David's style of thinking fit in perfectly at these meetings of innovators. He provided the additional mechanism needed to bring forward and capture the novel ideas AMI members had generated.

Looking through David's body of work from those programs reminds me that sometimes his drawings seemed to me to be a little bit "out there." But then, so was David. He intended his cartoons to reflect a conversation between creative individuals on a journey of discovery, and he never intended them to deliver a punch line. If you didn't get them, you probably hadn't been there.

## ULTIMATE COACH

*I&O* was published for seventeen years, and David provided hundreds of illustrations. He also illustrated several books and other publications. If you worked at CCL during that time, you saw his work.

That was pretty much the extent of my awareness of David—until he found out through a third party that I was a frustrated cartoonist. From that day on he saw me as one of his inner circle, and that was an interesting place to be.

David required me to provide a regular output of cartoon drafts. He was the ultimate encouraging coach. He always found something he liked about my amateurish attempts and made me feel good about the work I had done. He might have added a line here or suggested a different background there, but always with a light touch, and he never tried to alter my idea for a cartoon. He also challenged me to do better and kept talking about my stack of scribbles as my *portfolio*. After David critiqued my work I always felt motivated to do more.

David encouraged me to submit some cartoons for publication, but I resisted out of fear of rejection. Then, reluctantly, I submitted some car-

CREATIVE SCIENTISTS WHO WENT INTO  
SCIENCE TO GET AWAY FROM PEOPLE  
ARE MADE INTO ADMINISTRATORS.



toons to a friend of a friend, which led to a two-year run of my cartoons in a weekly supplement to the local newspaper, the *Greensboro News & Record*. It wasn't exactly the *New Yorker*, but having them published was fun and it forced me to think about my world in a new way. It also helped me understand that even the most frustrating or absurd thing that happened to me at work or at home could be viewed as material to help me meet next week's deadline.

I drew the cartoons until the supplement got axed. (I like to think there was no correlation with my cartoons.) I enjoyed seeing my work in print, but I think David enjoyed it even more. He believed that people are much more creative than they think they are, and he always said he could teach anybody to draw his or her ideas.

David slowed down a bit in his cartooning when he developed vision problems, and it would break my heart to watch him draw with one hand while holding the other hand over his failing eye. Then he could make me laugh out loud when, in typical fashion, he would sign a note to me *El Ojo Uno*, or "One Eye." When I stopped drawing my cartoons on a regular basis, I saw less of David, who was eventually to stop working at CCL because of declining health. It was during this time that he stopped by my office to say hello

and, because I wasn't there, left a note on my desk, signing it with the self-portrait seen at the beginning of this column.

Karen Hills, David's daughter, says he always drew himself smaller and gawkier than he really was, preferring to focus on others. Those of us who had an opportunity to know David will miss his presence at our Greensboro campus, and those who knew him only through his drawings will miss his spin on the subjects of leadership and creativity.

What would David think about a column dedicated to his memory? Like many other ideas, this sentiment is best captured by a David Hills original, as seen below. ♡



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