Why drawings?

Below are examples of the hundreds of drawings we have collected from our sessions. We didn't find the next Van Gogh, but people are able to convey great thoughts with drawings in a very concise and precise way. This is how employees feel in their own words and drawings. The drawings come from managers, senior leaders as well as employees.
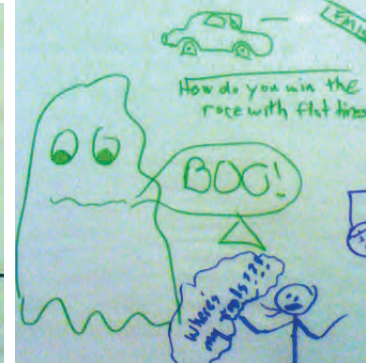
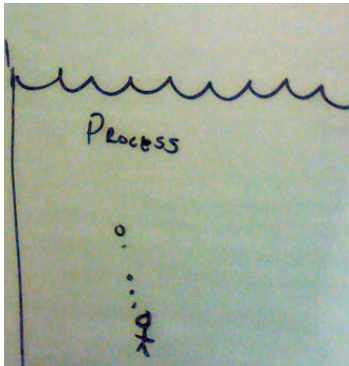Stress/too much responsibility
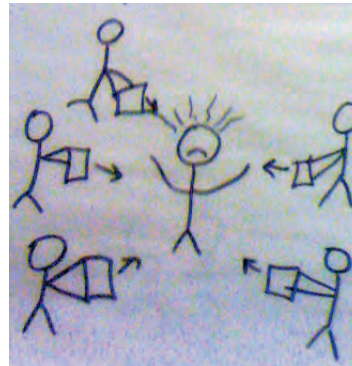
Manager always gets angry

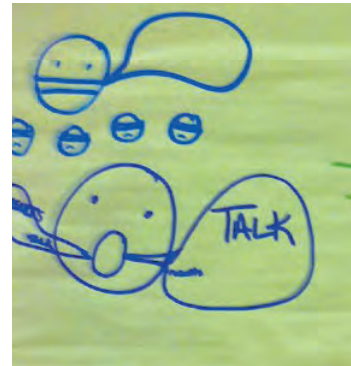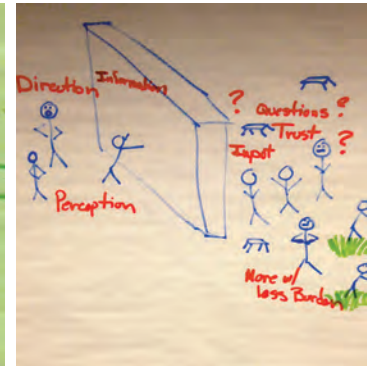No direction

Management by fear

Drowning in process

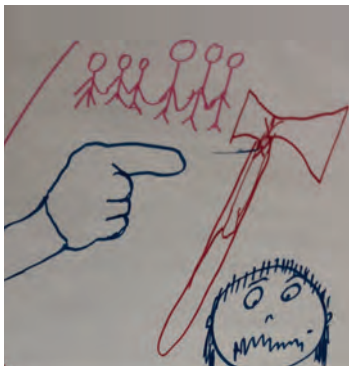Pulled in too many directions

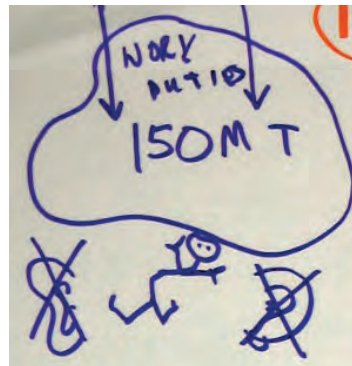Managers talk but don't listen
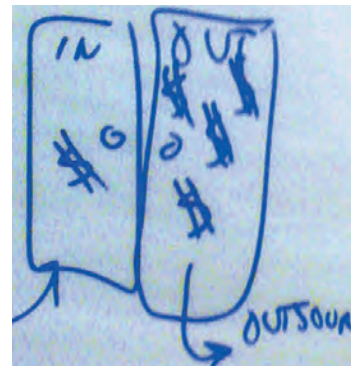
Wall between workers and sr.lead

Fear of losing job (axe)

No one listens; I'm being crushed

Outsourcing

'Kill the favorites'

Uneven accountabilities

Money is being hoarded
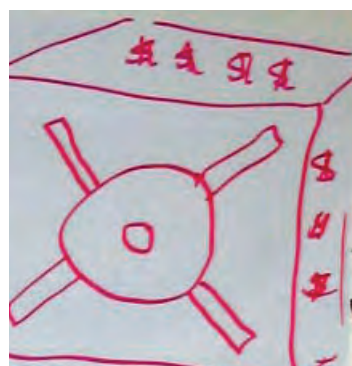
We hear about things in press
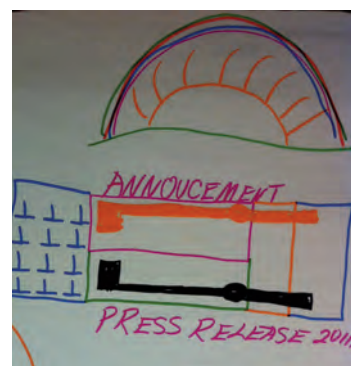
Too many fires (Corp. arsonists)

Thrown under the bus

Donkeys make most noise

'Playing it safe until retirement'

Communication issues

Left alone to fail

Firemen as arsonists

No direction

Do not respect limits of time

Process not up to amount of work

Workload never eases up

Too much email

Up Hill climb

Silos

Tug--of--war

Too much drama

Can't reach people on phone

"People are motivated when they feel competent."

David Brooks

Format for a Priorities Forum: Listen First; Solve later
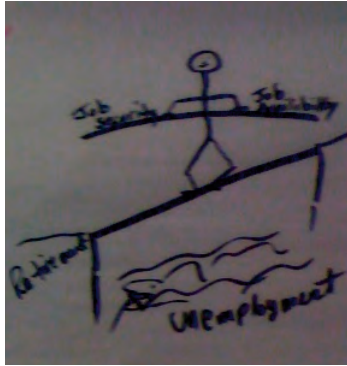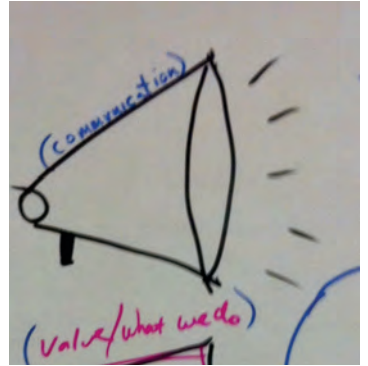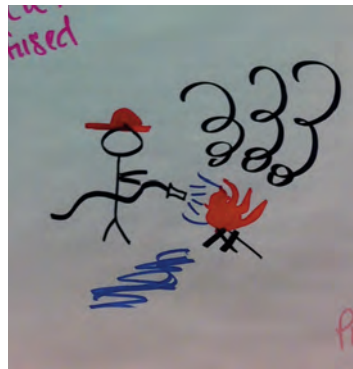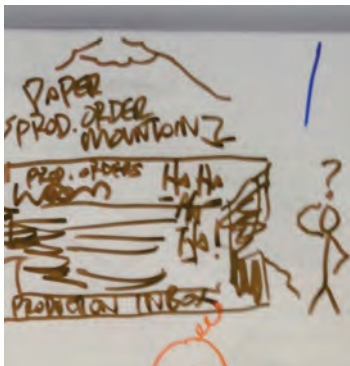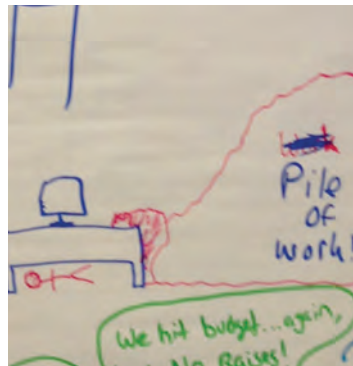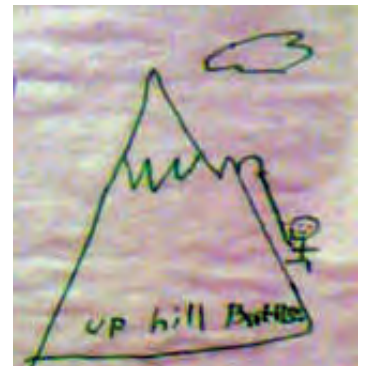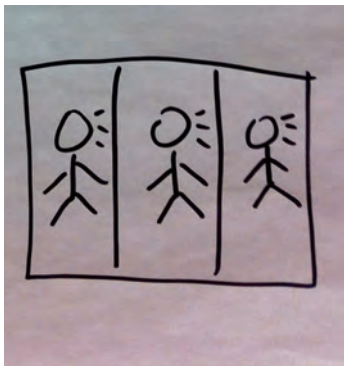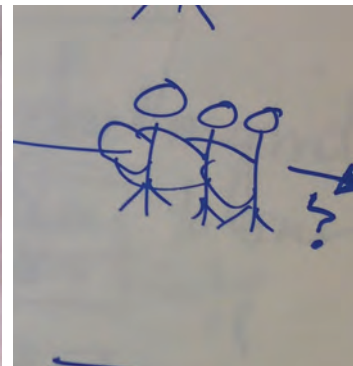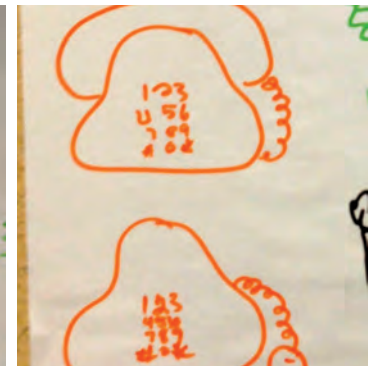
Target Audience
Priorities Forums work best when a diversity of roles, levels and perspectives is represented in a group of at least 12 and no more than 50 people.

Learning Objectives (what you will learn)
• Establish the expectation that employees and frontline managers can and should *identify and solve problems*.
• Managers and employees get more specific about Top Workplaces employee survey results – good & bad.
• Employees and managers recognize how to identify core non-technical barriers and develop actionable steps to resolve professional and interpersonal issues.
• Throughout the process, people will experience how to communicate complicated issues in a non-threatening manner.

Outcomes (results you will measure)
• Participants will identify and prioritize three specific issues they can resolve.

• Begin to discuss responsibilities, authorities and accountability for improvement.

• Milestones and measurements for results

FORMAT

Solution Forums typically last between 90 minutes and two hours, depending on the number of people and the complexity of the issues. The ideal number of people in a town hall is 30-35.

I. Who is in the room?

It is important to have a mix of managers and employees sitting together to hear each others' perspectives on a set of events. Depending on the number of people, we will do a quick round of introductions - who, what you do, how long with the company? This "check-in" gives everyone a chance to be heard and recognized before we do the heavy lifting.

II. Outside influences

We want people to first consider what has happened "to" the company by outside forces or events during a specific project or timeframe that may have changed the nature of their work, the environment they work in or the "direction" of the company. This exercise gives participants a shared perspective and a sense that the culture did not "pop up overnight."

One exercise produced the analogy of a polluted lake:
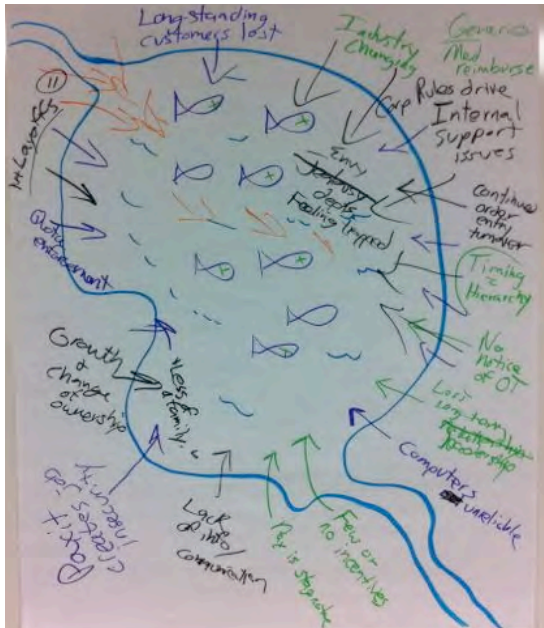
Clearly, we are not looking for fine artists; this is an exercise in getting a lot of ideas captured in a short amount of time.

III. Current State

People divide into smaller groups to better define internal speed bumps and road blocks that the TopWorkplaces survey has uncovered. Using a widely adopted technique, teams draw pictures representing their perspectives on the issues most important to them. Often something is blocking good communication between management and employees and/or good execution of strategies.

IV. Themes

These drawings help people communicate difficult or "loaded" concepts quickly. After each team has a chance to show and explain their drawings, we work as a large group to find the common themes. Those themes are prioritized and developed into practical next steps.

V. Take one and solve it

Once the themes have been identified and ranked, we want to leave participants with a plan to address them. Given the time limits of a town hall, the group work may stop at the priority level and others – most often volunteers from different levels – will take on the remaining details.

We take the first priority and work with the group to construct ideas on how to address it. The questions asked and answered:
1. What can employees do to improve this?
2. What can management do to improve this?
3. Who will take on the priority?
4. How quickly does this need to be addressed?

VI. Check-out.
Give each person a chance to relate his or her biggest takeaway, positive or negative, from the session.

Employee Forums in action

Employees and managers, in groups big and small and at firms traditional and high-tech, come together to identify common barriers and to devise solutions.

National Non-Profit based in NYC.

Senior leaders at High-Tech start-up in Portland, Oregon

Telecommunications firm in Texas

Unionized paper mill in Maine

Logistics company in Georgia