

Case Study: **ABN AMRO**

ABN AMRO used Six Thinking Hats to help employees generate and present new ideas to top management.



The Story:

ABN AMRO is a prominent international bank with 3,000 branches in 60 countries. In 2001, Mary Lou Leistikow, a Certified de Bono Instructor with QrëaCom, was at a conference when an ABN AMRO manager approached her with a challenge. The Dutch branch of ABN AMRO employed more than 7,000 people, yet their employee suggestion box averaged merely 60 suggestions per year. This particular manager felt certain that the employees would offer more opinions and suggestions if creativity became a higher priority. They discussed the issue at some length, and the manager asked Mary Lou to make ABN AMRO more creative.

Mary Lou's first action was to get rid of the suggestion box. Then she went to the top managers and asked them for commitment to creativity. She proposed a program called "The Golden Idea" to encourage innovation among employees. Mary Lou explained the benefit of taking the employees' ideas seriously, and she asked the managers to commit to implementing one new idea per quarter. They agreed.

To implement "The Golden Idea" Mary Lou held three half-day Green Hat sessions with 20 employees at a time. She wanted to teach a small group of employees about creativity, hoping that they would spread the word to the rest of the company. During the half-day sessions, the employees generated 300 completely new ideas that would improve business. This was a great start to the new program.

Each quarter, the management team asked specific questions about a particular topic, such as, "How can we use the Internet more with our customers?" or "How can we improve communication within the branch?" An internal web page was set up as a way for employees to quickly submit ideas. Within the first year, employees had more than 600 ideas listed, partly because the website was such a convenient repository.

Each quarter, a creative team sifted through all the ideas and selected the ten best. Then, they used the Six Thinking Hats to decide which five ideas to present to the senior managers. The managers then chose which idea to implement. Because the senior leadership team had committed to evaluate the ideas and implement the best one, employees finally felt as though they had an effective vehicle through which to voice their opinions.

There have been numerous topics and hundreds of ideas exchanged since "The Golden Idea" began. ABN AMRO continues to improve its customer care and internal strength with the assistance of its employees and their Green Hat suggestions.

