For the past year, I served as the General Manager of University Graphic Systems. I managed an outstanding group of 14 individuals who greatly contributed to the success and improvement of the company. Looking back on the year, I can tell you we faced a great amount challenges, both internal and external; nevertheless, we learned from our experiences, and I hope others will use our team as an example to do the same. My goal is to document our year—the good and the bad—to show how we worked as a team and the importance of individual, intrinsic motivation.

What is UGS?

Students often cite Cal Poly's philosophy of "Learn by Doing" as the reason for their education's success, and I think that their employers would agree. The opportunity to gain and apply real-world knowledge in the university setting allows students to cultivate skills that they need in the workplace; however, this learning does not always occur in the classroom. At University Graphic Systems, Graphic Communication students practice their skills in an actual workplace setting. Working with the company is their ultimate "learn by doing" experience.

University Graphic Systems began in 1969 as a commercial offset printing company. Throughout the years, the company's services have greatly evolved and expanded to encompass many aspects of the Graphic Communication Industry, including digital printing, screen printing, and web, design, and marketing services. Yet one thing has remained constant: UGS is operated and managed by Cal Poly Graphic Communication students. The company offers an internship opportunity for all students in the major where they gain class credit in addition to hands-on production experience.

For a select team of students each year, University Graphic Systems also acts as a senior project substitute. These students are the managers responsible for ensuring that the company is productive and operational. Because UGS is a diverse and dynamic digital imaging company, students interested in becoming managers have a wide array of departments to chose from, ranging from support services, (such as Customer Service and Marketing), to production management (such as Bindery & Finishing, Design & Web Production, and Print Production). Students chosen for these roles manage interns and employees and perform duties that reflect similar positions at companies in the industry. Because the students are responsible for the

success and financial wellbeing of the company, they experience a level of accountability that does not exist in most other academic settings.

I have been involved with the company since my freshman year, and during the last year I served as its General Manger. I am just completing my third year as a Graphic Communication student. I hope to graduate next year with a concentration in Management and a minor in English. After school, my plan is to pursue a career in independent magazine publishing. But before I can look forward, I must look back at the most influential experience during my time at Cal Poly: University Graphic Systems.

The General Manager is the leader of the company. It is his or her responsibility to maintain stability while planning for the future. Even in a small company like UGS, this can only be done through the work of a functioning team of motivated individuals. When I was an intern of the company, I learned that I not only wanted to improve UGS, but I wanted to do so by facilitating others in reaching their own goals. Although only a sophomore, I was confident that I already had the proper skillset and knowledge of the company to fill the position. However, my main motivation for applying was not out of self-interest; I believed that my vision for UGS was legitimately the best path for its future.

During my time as the General Manager of UGS, I faced some unique challenges that I believe most students do not encounter until they enter the workforce, if at all. For a year, I managed a team of fourteen individuals who were also my peers. Like any manager, it was my responsibility to motivate this team to perform to a standard needed to keep the company profitable. Unlike most managers, I was forced to rely almost solely on intrinsic methods to control motivation, for I had little actually authority besides a contribution to their senior project grade. This lack of accountability did ultimately hinder our team's productivity. However, I

believe that we did make meaningful contributions to the company that will benefit its future and

show our overall success as a team.

Accountability

While we had many successes as a team, we also faced many challenges. Many of these were external factors beyond our control, but some were internal failures when individuals did not complete their duties or fulfill their obligations to the team. We depended upon each other for support, so the actions or the shortcomings of individuals affected the entire team's morale. A team with high morale is more motivated and productive. It is frustrating to contribute so much of one's time to a company when it seems that some members are not as dedicated.

My job as the General Manager was to ensure that all individuals were doing their jobs so that our team was as productive as possible. Holding managers accountable with the little actual authority I had was one of my greatest personal challenges. Although I was not responsible for every individual's actions, I was accountable for their consequences. I had to deal with their effects on our team and on the company's image.

It is not always easy to label workers as "good" or "bad" employees. Individuals work and contribute in their own way, but they also fail in their own way. Some managers would occasionally miss office hours, but work overtime or go above and beyond during the time that they were in the office. Complicating the situation further, some departments demanded a greater time commitment then others. It upset some employees when it seemed like their coworkers were not working hard in one area; however, they did not realize that individual's efforts in other areas.

Another recurrent issue was that some managers in office hours would spend time on personal work rather than working on production when no jobs were due immediately. Even more frustrating would be when help was urgently needed and not available because a manager

missed their office hour without getting it covered. In this situation, present managers had to scramble to complete production and serve Print & Copy clients.

From the very beginning, my team's goal was to openly communicate with each other. Personally, I hoped that my team would come to me with any issues they had regarding the company, its employees, and my management. Managers did come to me with some concerns about their interactions with other members of the team, but I often felt like they were holding back or reluctant to speak about the issues. Hoping to reduce this, I created an online form for employees to post anonymously. Unfortunately, I only received four replies. Because of this lack of feedback, I sometimes felt out of touch from my team. It upset me because I did not know how to fix the problems that I was unaware of. I think that part of the reason managers were unwilling to come to me is because they doubted my ability to effectively hold managers accountable.

The criticism that I did receive showed me that I was not properly exercising my authority as the team's leader. I was not always confident in my decision-making ability, which led to my team feeling lost or confused at times. I was surprised to hear that my team wanted to be held more accountable and told what to do more often. I believe that I could have offered the company a better sense of direction by setting more concrete goals and tracking our success towards them. We had many individual goals, yet I do not think these inspired us to work together as a team. By better tracking objectives, I could have created a new area of accountability. This could have ensured that all managers were sharing the workload, which would have reduced the resentment many managers had towards some members of the team.

In hindsight, I wish that I had taken greater disciplinary action against those who did not

contribute to the company as much as they were expected to. However, I do not think it would have been possible for me to do so with the current system and culture in place.

Managers are compensated for their services in two ways. The first is monetary: managers are paid for their office hours— 8 hours weekly. All other work is attributed to Senior Project credit. Because managers do so much work outside of their paid office hour, far beyond what is reasonably considered two units of credit, I was advised to pay managers on a salary basis- meaning that if a manager missed or traded their office hour, their weekly pay would not be reduced. Although I still believe that this was the right decision, it weakened my authority as a leader. The only hold I had on my managers was a contribution to their senior project grade. Even this authority was reduced for we did not have a syllabus since our advisor was also new to the company.

Because I did not have incentive to give or withhold from my employees, I was forced to rely heavily on intrinsic motivation methods. I appealed to my team to work hard for their own personal pride and experience, but more importantly to avoid letting each other down as a team. For the most part, this did work well. On several instances I spoke to employees about their poor behavior. I reminded them that their lack of work (or reputation for it) reduced team moral. No one wants to be the one who let down the team. But in an environment such as the university setting, the demand on the individual is extremely high. This is especially true with Cal Poly's quarter system, where due dates are packed into shortened terms. As individual needs increase, the priority of collective needs decreases. In other words, people put themselves first. It's human nature, and college is sometimes a game of survival. Many students have trouble completing all that is demanded of them; with the added pressures of something as time consuming and

important as UGS, individual stress is exponentially increased. It is easy to see why managers could choose their needs over those of the team.

In a normal business, I do not think these factors typically hold. If employees do not fulfill their responsibilities, the company lets them go. At UGS, this is not really an option, for we do not have enough trained labor to take over mid-year. Still, I think that my team can be an example of the nature of individual vs. team motivation. We were successful because the vast majority of the time we put team needs over our individual needs. We were only frustrated when another member of the team did not do the same.

Defining Success

After a year of long year of hard work, it is difficult to hear that your team has failed. It is even harder when this criticism comes from members of that team. What's worse still is when you are the manager of that team, and it was you were accountable for ensuring their success.

Despite the end of the year criticism, I know that my team was successful. It is true that I did not always make the right decisions and made common management mistakes that weakened my team, but I am learning as well. The fourteen of us approached this year promising to give UGS our all. Although we may have fallen short at times, I believe that we made huge strides for the company, but more importantly, as a team.

Because that's what UGS is. It's learning by doing well and poorly: as a team and as an individual. At the end of the year, I can tell you we exceeded our true goal of gathering relevant experience. I'll never forget my time at UGS. I believe it was a success, and I'd love to thank the individuals I shared it with.