

has been named lighting designer. Previously, Bregman had

banking. And **William Murphy** was named senior vice president,

2012 Ruth-Marie E. Fincher Service Award from the Clerkship Di-

been promoted to chief marketing officer at **Fox Rothschild**.

ciate at **White and Williams**. Previously, McClellan was associ-

of commercial real estate banking group of

will not be returned. Direct questions to: ssherwood@bizjournals.com.



What is organization development — in three words?

A recent discussion thread on LinkedIn's organization development network group, which is a group populated by people who do essentially what I do for a living, began with a question: "In three words, what do you actually do?"

Our in-group joke is that we struggle to make clear to people what we "actually do." The idea that someone might be able to nail it in three words was intriguing.

Consider this column a service to an under-appreciated profession that's been very good to me for a long time and for my colleagues, many of whom are struggling in an economy that tends to think it doesn't need them right now.

Before I share what my colleagues said about organization development (OD for short), I probably ought to offer some clue to what it is for those completely uninitiated. Think of a profession that, simply stated, helps leaders get the most out of people, typically their most expensive asset.

As you read the phrases, think about how you would describe your own work in three words. Good luck if you're a hyperbaric nurse or a phased-array technician or a chemical technologist.

Some of the descriptions my colleagues



Perspective on People

Richard McKnight

offered were florid, almost embarrassing. For example, there was "enable generative conversations," and "encourage dream realization." You can bet no accountant or systems analyst would say anything like this! But we OD people are nothing if not a creative lot.

One phrase was entirely self-focused, an occupational hazard: "Great work, mostly," the author said. Another author revealed he either can't count or is unable to follow directions (additional occupational hazards): "Educate, develop, guide and empower."

Are you getting clear about what an OD professional does yet and how indispensable we all think we are to you?

At first, my vote for the most outlandish description of OD was "facilitate eureka experiences," at least until I added my own: "Cultivate workplace spirit." And I'm a business strategy guy! Don't laugh:

The self-respecting phrases had already been taken!

The least flowery and most concrete phrases were "support, counsel, develop," "ask great questions," and "connect, advise, reinforce." But these phrases don't really say that much about OD; they could describe just about any service profession.

We begin to get to the substance of organization development with the phrase "coach, develop, strategize," and its results get clearer with "change their thinking" and "help others change."

As I said earlier, like most professionals, we OD people tend to think of ourselves as exceptionally important to business, even vital and decisive. Since this is the absolute truth (!), let me offer an argument — if not a definition of — our field. You might think you don't need to pay someone to "facilitate eureka experiences," but you might feel a need for "multiplying your capital," my latest

three-word description.

We live in an age when capital is both expensive and hard to obtain. But one source of capital — people — at least if the conditions are right, can be vastly more valuable than physical capital, financial capital, or whiz-bang technology. In fact, when working cooperatively and artfully together, people can invent ways to replace all other forms of capital. Plants and equipment can't do this, dollars can't do this, iPads can't do this. Only people can. But the conditions have to be right. That's where my colleagues and I come in.

Help my colleagues. Hire an organization development professional. You'll "be enriched today!"

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RICHARD MCKNIGHT is a principal of McKnight-Kaney LLC, executive coaches and organization development consultants. He is the co-author of "Leading Strategy Execution," among other books. He can be reached at RMcKnight@McKnightKaney.com.