



## *Herding Cats*



The risks and challenges of  
assembling teams of  
technical writers



# *Presentation Overview*

- Business context
- Setting the stage
  - Business models
  - Estimates, proposals, plans
- Building teams
  - Recruiting, managing
- Adapting to changes



# *Business Context*

- Ace Communications history
- Portland, Oregon business climate
- Technical writing profession
- Temporary services trends



# *When are teams appropriate?*

- Large scale projects, for example:
  - Enterprise-wide computer system installations
  - New product introductions or new sites
- Multi-disciplinary projects, for example:
  - Online + print + document management
  - Training + documentation

# *Business Models*

Who's the boss?

- Subcontractors (1099)
- Employees (W-2)
- Contract employees (W-2, hourly)



# *Estimates and Proposals*

- Importance of accurate project estimates
- Hidden costs
  - Proofing/revisions
  - Production/compiling
  - Re-formatting for multiple platforms
  - Unexpected changes
- Estimating labor costs

# *Recruiting*

- Finding skilled talent
- Evaluating prospective team members
  - Instinct vs. references
  - What to avoid
- Starting small



# *Managing writers*

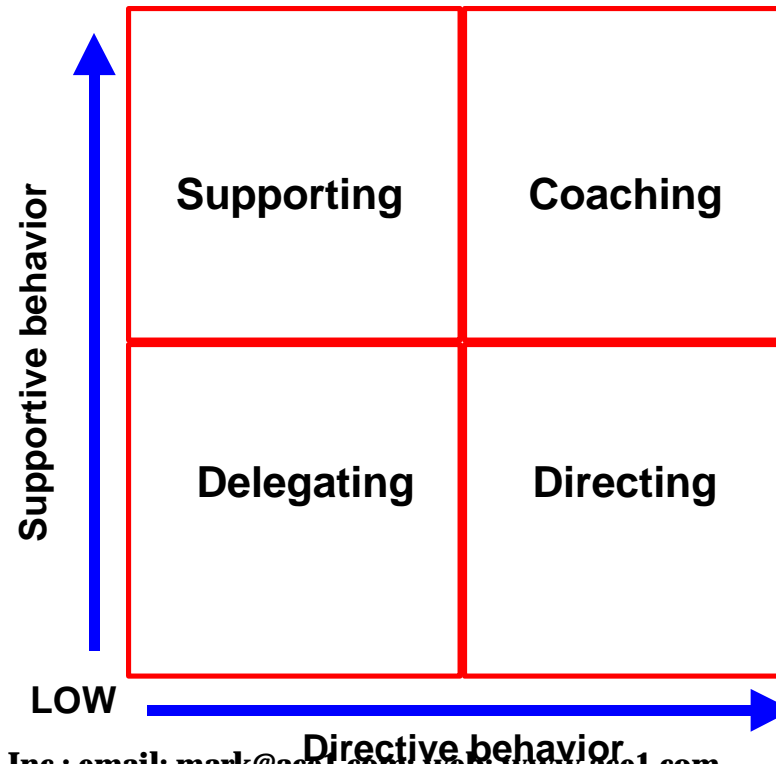
(Herding cats)

- **Writer characteristics**
  - Attention to detail, diligence
  - People skills
- **Systems and processes**
  - Templates & style guides
  - Peer review, editing, proofing
  - Milestones, status reports
- **Successes and failures**



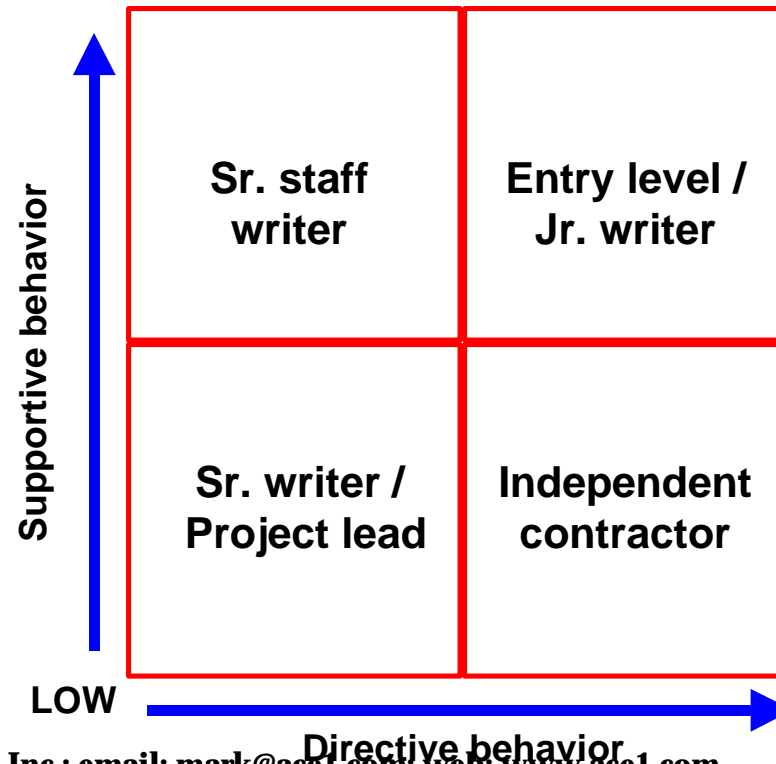
# *Situational leadership model*

- Applying the right mix of support and direction



# *Categorizing cats*

- Different personalities, experience and motivations



# *Keeping writers happy*

- Happy writers do better work
- Clear objectives, clear directions
- Appreciative audience
- Reward and recognition



# *Cat herding tools*

- Monitoring and reporting progress
  - Project tracking and meetings
  - Budget reports
- Peer reviews
- Benefits
- Tackling the next project



# *Adapting to changes*

- When changes are out of your control
- Replacing key players
- Disaster recovery





# *Summary*

- Catnip, salmon, and cream
- Strokes and scratches around the ears
- Mice and other opportunities