Leadership Team Conversations

Are you having the right conversation with your team?

*By Susan Mayginnes, M.A., President of Commit to Greatness Consulting*

*Contact:* *smayginnes@gmail.com*

*www.committogreatness.com*

*This is a free paper that you may share with your organization at no cost.*

Leaders often default to tactical conversations to try to resolve problems or achieve goals. The problem with this approach is that it may be missing the mark. Identify the correct “level” of conversation before you start. Is it a conversation about tactics? Criteria? Values? Goals? Purpose? Most of the conversations that leaders need to have with each other and with employees are conversations about values and purpose. Why is this important? *Because you may be coming up with great tactical solutions for a completely different purpose or that does not serve your company’s values.*

Think of failure as simply coming up with the right solution for the wrong problem. Getting clarity on purpose first and *what the value of this is,* will serve to determine what is most important and why. From there, identify goals, strategies and finally what problem are you really trying to solve?

Entrepreneurs and creative types are usually good at coming up with lots of “good ideas or solutions” and then try to implement as many as possible as quickly as possible. This usually results in dissipated energy, loss of focus, constant switching of priorities and organizational overwhelm. Nothing gets done or gets done effectively. People tend to arrive at a problem, come up with “fast food” answers or the “idee du jour”, and then hit the ground running trying to apply solutions without having first gotten clarity on the purpose and goal or clearly naming the problem. The more accurately the problem is named, the better equipped you will be to solve it. Effective people, “hit the ground getting clarity” and learning more about the problem before applying solutions.

Years ago I worked with Pat Mene, former V.P. of Quality for the Ritz-Carlton Hotel Company Int’l. He was one of the most effective leaders I’d ever met. Ritz-Carlton employees and hotel staff would always come to him with problems and he always had the same response; “Tell me more.” He would find out everything he could about the problem, get clarity on the goal, ask many question including questioning the goal itself, and then consider all of that before he would ever suggest a solution. I saw him do this again and again, even one time for a soft-serve ice cream machine that wasn’t working properly at the hotel bar on the beach! But when he came up with a solution, he nailed it.

**The conversation should be:**

1. What is the purpose? What will achieving that do for us that’s important? And what will that get us? Get clear about what you are ultimately after.
2. What are the right goals to fulfill this purpose?
3. What are our rules or criteria for fulfilling these goals? (Ex: Must be within current budget, must be able to implement within 30 days, must adhere to our values, must facilitate an easier customer experience, etc.)
4. What ideas can we come up with to do that? Brainstorm.

**Most people tend to have backward conversations. It goes something like this:**

Tactics/Ideas  Rules/Criteria  Goals  Purpose

***It sounds like this:***

1. Hey! Here’s what we oughta do…..

Then we try a bunch of different ideas as each one proves ineffective.

2. Eventually, someone says, “Wait a minute, what’s our criteria?

3. Then after that conversation someone asks, “Exactly why are we doing this? What are we trying to accomplish?”

4. Finally, “Is that the best way to forward our Strategic Intent or Purpose?”

**So start at the beginning. Create a dialogue that starts at the top and works its way down:**

1. What is our overarching purpose? What will achieving this do for us? What’s most important?
2. What is currently missing that if provided could produce a breakthrough toward accomplishing this? Clarify goals.
3. What are our rules and criteria for meeting these goals?
4. Let’s brainstorm ideas for best ways to meet these goals with this criteria.

Creating the right flow of conversation will optimize your effectiveness and save you enormous amounts of time and money. It allows you to align action with real purpose and values and reduce organizational overload.

*“*[*Efficiency is doing things right; effectiveness is doing the right things.*](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/quotes/p/peterdruck134881.html)*”*

[***Peter Drucker***](http://www.brainyquote.com/quotes/authors/p/peter_drucker.html)