



THE Learning Advantage

Mobley's Musings – Family Talk

As we move into the holiday season, I hear people say they dread the conversations to come at family gatherings. We know the old saw about not discussing politics or religion. And giving parenting advice usually doesn't go over well either. But sometimes it seems we just can't help ourselves, and before you know it people are shouting, slamming doors and retreating to opposite corners.

Imagine what family gatherings would be like if we expressed genuine interest in another's point of view by asking open-ended questions and then listening to them instead of judging or arguing. For one thing, it would lessen the drama and lower the volume. But, more importantly, we might understand how others came to their particular views. When we aren't invested in changing someone else's mind or defending our own beliefs, we can really hear another perspective.

If you want to steer clear of touchy subjects, plan ahead by drawing up a list of safe topics to discuss. Ask about planned vacations or "bucket list" places to visit. Talk about new plays, movies, books, music, or TV shows that are attracting attention. And if there is a skill or knowledge you plan to pursue in the new year, ask what others may know about it and their recommendations for learning more.

Here's to a happy, healthy and drama-free holiday season.

Sandy



Sandy Mobley

Ask Sandy

When the boss is wrong

What should you do when your boss says something that you know is wrong? Should you immediately point out the error? My clients sometimes find themselves in the uncomfortable position of being in a meeting when their boss says something that isn't correct and they're unsure whether to challenge it.

Kyle chose to wait until after a team meeting to tell his boss in private that the delivery date she'd discussed was actually a month later according to the project plan. Kyle's boss was livid that he hadn't said anything in the meeting and people had left with bad information. He explained that he didn't want to embarrass her, though now she would have to send out a memo to correct her error.

Kyle's decision to not correct his boss grew out of a previous experience he'd had with a different boss whom he'd contradicted in a meeting. She took him to task later, calling him disloyal and criticizing his interpersonal skills.

When is it appropriate to correct your boss? It depends. It helps to understand how your boss would want you to handle the situation *before* it happens. If your boss seems overly concerned about challenges to her authority, privately pointing out an error is probably a better bet. But if she's more interested in ensuring smooth operations, she will probably not mind being corrected in a meeting, especially if the error has the potential to cause problems further down the road. But constantly correcting trivial points can be annoying even for a boss who's confident in her authority.

Being sensitive about how you point out the error can make a big difference. You might phrase it as part of a question like, "Does this delivery date take into account the delay we're having in getting parts?" Another approach is to take the blame: "Sorry boss, I may not have sent you the update about delays in getting parts that will likely impact the schedule."

Choosing when and how to correct your boss requires you to weigh issues of leadership style, ego, and team performance. Finding ways for your boss to save face while correcting errors can signal that your goal is to help ensure the team's success, not to score points.

Learning for Leaders – Tell your direct reports how and under what circumstances you want them to correct you in meetings with seniors, customers, and peers.

Coaches Corner – Help your clients develop approaches to correcting misstatements that are sensitive and nuanced.

If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



Meaningful Appreciation: Beyond Donuts and Flowers

When it comes to expressing appreciation, managers have many informal options, such as offering praise, spending time developing employees, and treating the team to donuts and bagels or a pizza lunch. More formal expressions include thoughtful performance appraisals, raises, and promotions. Few employees would turn down any of these offerings, but for managers looking to take appreciation to the next level, there's another option that can be particularly meaningful. It involves recognizing a person's strengths and unique qualities and assigning that person a business-critical task where those characteristics can make the difference between success and failure.

When I was a systems engineer and we had a client who was unhappy and ready to cancel our contract, the district manager would always ask me to help resolve it. It wasn't because of my technical skills, but rather my ability to listen to the client and tease out the root cause of the problem. I recall one client who was very unhappy because "the system did not do what the salesman promised it would."

After I arrived on site, the technical staff told me they had been lead to believe the system would not only capture data but allow them to manipulate the data in ways that I knew had never been done in any of our installations. Realizing the system could not provide the functionality, the technical staff took it upon themselves to revamp the code — no small feat. I was amazed how they'd gotten the system to do things it had not been designed to do.

Addressing the Challenge

Thanks to the client's engineers, the system was delivering the necessary functionality, but senior leadership resented that our salesman had "over-promised and under-delivered." And the client's engineers were annoyed that leadership didn't recognize their expertise in getting the system to work. No wonder the client was unhappy!

After tactfully apologizing to the CEO and CIO, I explained how exceptional their engineers were in adapting the system. My company was so impressed, I told them, that we wanted their engineers to travel to our home office —

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