

## **Do You Really Want to Hear It?**

“Why would I encourage someone to disagree with me? I think through my decisions carefully and what I want is my staff to implement them.”

I found myself hesitating to say it, but I was thinking, “Don’t worry, they won’t say anything, even the truth, if you don’t want to hear.”

Most of us aren’t comfortable having hard conversations. So, if you or a managing partner, senior supervisor or other person with an assured level of authority feels uncomfortable, how likely will a junior partner, team member or administrator feel at ease confronting you with facts or ideas that disagree with what you think you know?

What I have to suggest may not seem important if you’re sure you know the truth, all of it. But I doubt you would be reading this newsletter if that described you. So I’m encouraging you to learn to invite team members to tell you the truth as they see it.

A couple of quick facts about truth you may not know:

- 1) People tend to be confident they’re right in inverse relation to actually being right.
- 2) The subjective filter we necessarily have to look through often changes the fundamental data laid out in front of us.
- 3) One way to get a better reading on the truth is to view it from multiple perspectives and see what the common traits are.

To get multiple perspectives gather the opinions of a variety of people, people with a different perspective than you.

You can’t expect that employees will tell you what they’re thinking unless you send them a clear, unequivocal message and guarantee their “safety.” Their discomfort with hard conversations is multiplied because you have control over their work life. And of course you don’t have a way to guarantee you won’t be upset except to demonstrate it over and over on small things.

A recent New York Times interview with Dan Rosensweig, the president of Chegg (they rent textbooks online and by mail) discussed an initial strategy we encourage our clients to try. Rosensweig asks employees, “If you had my job, other than giving yourself more vacation time and a raise, what’s the first thing that you would do that you don’t think we’re doing yet?”

He also asks, “What do you need more of from me? What do you need less of from me? What is it that I’m doing that you would like me to stop doing completely? What it is that I’m not doing enough of that you’d like some more of?”

If you respond welcomingly to these general questions, you demonstrate that you're open to hearing alternatives. Now when you ask about a specific project or issue you're more likely to hear dissenting voices and other takes on the truth.

Oh, by-the-way, when my client said he didn't need his staff's input, I spoke up and politely disagreed, and he still calls me in to help him learn how to be a better manager.

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We have a short training we can offer your team to help them speak truth to power. If you want to know more about it, please contact us. Past participants have seen increases in creativity, improvements in systems and more efficient practices.