

How Can You Improve in the “Art of Relationship”?

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In the last issue of the Change Ability Challenge I wrote about the importance for leaders to excel in influencing others to get results. Success is determined in interpersonal terms and this requires effectiveness in the “Art of Relationship”.

So how can you improve your capability in this “Art of Relationship”?

It requires walking before you try to run!!

Here are a few questions to ask as you begin the walk:

- Do you know how you impact others?
 - **Ask people.** People who you trust are a good starting point to understand how others see your strengths and weaknesses in relating to them.
 - **Ask your team.** Hold a meeting with your team and ask them what they appreciate about your way of leading and what they would like you to do differently
 - **Be observant.** Watch for how people react nonverbally to your comments. Pay attention to the words and tone of voice as people respond to your comments. Do they seem to be defending their ideas? Do they appear open to exploring options? Do they make constructive comments to build on your ideas?
 - **Use structured tools.** One useful approach is to gather information from a variety of people with whom you interact regularly. This can be done online. Also the confidentiality of each person’s response can be honored so people are more comfortable about being honest. This is commonly referred to as 360 degree feedback since you are getting feedback from bosses, peers, direct reports and customers of your services.
- Do you have a plan for improving your effectiveness in influencing others?
 - **Make your goals specific.** For example, let’s say you are viewed as “a negative person” because you always point out what is

wrong with a person's suggestions. You could set a goal to critically evaluate ideas while at the same time looking for and acknowledging the constructive parts of a person's ideas or proposals.

- **Target short steps forward.** In this example, you may create a short term action plan that in the next staff meeting you will point out one suggestion for how a person's idea could be used to address the issue being discussed. This doesn't mean that for the rest of your career that you will never critically examine or express potential roadblocks. See it as an experiment and learn from the results. Then make a longer range commitment to how you want to act
- **Plan for resistance (in yourself and others).** By exploring resistance to a change in advance, you increase the chances that you will stay the course to push through the roadblocks that will emerge. Part of the resistance will be your urge to revert to old habits. It feels awkward to experiment with new behaviors when we aren't sure of how successful we'll be. Others are used to the role you perform on the team. They may want you to behave the same because they know how to respond to you so that they can achieve what they want. This is called the "law of homeostasis". These "push and pull" forces will always be operating to keep things in balance—to maintain the status quo. So plan for it!
- Are you willing to practice and stretch yourself beyond your Comfort Zone?
 - **Stretch 30% beyond your comfort level.** This is called your "Zone of Ambiguity". You're not sure of the outcome. You feel your hands getting clammy as you anticipate taking this step. Yet you know it will be a step forward toward your goal if you succeed. If you don't have the impact you want, you may feel embarrassed but you can manage the consequences.
 - **Don't leap into your "Danger Zone".** Stretching 50-100% often leads to setbacks. You will be awkward and probably not very effective with a big stretch in how you behave. It may also have big consequences if your experiment fails.
 - **Practice, Practice, Practice.** Each time you experiment and achieve positive results you stretch your Comfort Zone. You will be making steady progress toward your longer term goal. In the above example you are initially holding back on your habit of pointing out the negatives in an argument to achieve your longer term goal. As



you get more effective at listening and constructively exploring other's ideas, you will be able to blend this with your talent of critically testing ideas for achieving the optimum solution. And the impact you will have on others will be much more influential.

- Do you have a support system to help as you engage in this process of change?
 - **Ask a close friend.** Specifically ask this person to watch your behavior, give you feedback and share ideas about new ways that you might try.
 - **Enlist your family members.** They see you every day and will often have the most blunt feedback and helpful suggestions. Tell them what you are trying to change and the type of impact that you want to achieve. Enlist them to support you in this effort. (They'll benefit too).
 - **Hire a trusted advisor** to walk this path with you. Get his or her help in gathering feedback from others, in offering suggestions and helping you hold yourself accountable. Ask the person to "tell you the things that you don't want to hear, so that you can become the person that you've always wanted to be."

Happy walking! And don't forget to enjoy the scenery!!

Whenever you would like to explore how you can more effectively master this "art of relationship" and achieve the results you've always wanted as a leader, please give me a call at 650-856-1752 or email me at cronkite@dirigoconsulting.com.