

THE EXCHANGE

This issue's featured subject is "Giving Correction & Guidance."

Painless Corrections

By Vincent Phipps, B.S.

Correcting someone can be painful. Being corrected can be excruciating! So how can we alleviate the discomfort on both sides? It's simple. Give measurable information that can lead to positive measurable results.

A typical correction may sound like this:

Supervisor: I called you in my office to tell you that you are not doing very well. You must do better. I want you to knuckle down and tighten up.

Employee: O.K.

Supervisor: Do you have any questions?

Employee: No.

Supervisor: Great! I am glad we had this conversation. I will expect to see immediate improvement. That's all, so get back out there in the field and go-go-go!

Employee: Alright.

About a week ago, I was conducting a group workshop and I gave the above example as a poor correction. Someone asked, "So what's so bad about that? It sounded fine to me." Before I could respond, another person in the group spoke up and said, "The employee does not know what to change. The supervisor gave zero information, and the employee asked no questions." We all had a good laugh about how poorly we have given or received corrections.

Use information in your correction. Replace ambiguous statements with detailed information based on your expectations. Consider the following examples:

Instead of saying, "You're too slow";

Replace with, "This task took you 5 days. Company standard states it should take a maximum of 3 days."

Instead of saying, "You are wrong";

Replace with, "The agreement is to pay \$10,590 by 10-14-2003, not \$10,950 by 10-15-2003."

Instead of saying, "That way isn't good enough";

Replace with, "The method we are using will result in a production rate of 5 products/hour. For us to meet our order deadline, we will have



to meet 10 products/hour or extend the deadline by 48 hours."

Instead of saying, "Shape up or ship out";

Replace with, "In the last 22 days, there have been two written complaints about your treatment of customers. If a third complaint is recorded within the next 8 days, disciplinary action according to the Employee Guidelines will be implemented."

Using words such as: "bad," "wrong," "improve," or "change," can be misleading. Although modifications are preferred, guide the other person with information so that they know what to avoid, and you have blazed a clear trail for them to follow. Using information instead of opinions or adjectives removes the personal and emotional charge of giving corrections.

If a person has a negative attitude, they can become defensive and get angry if you say, "Your attitude needs to improve if you want to remain in this department." They could say, "My attitude is just what this office needs." Talking with this person while using opinions about attitude and what's needed could lead to a never-ending discussion without being informative. The negative employee cannot successfully argue with the number of calls, what the callers said, when they called back, or what company policy states.

Instead, you can say, "Out of the last 10 calls, 8 have called me and told me you hung up on them. One of our official policies states that customers are to always be treated with respect and courtesy. Hanging up on customers could result in additional complaints, which are recorded and sent to our headquarters. When a customer becomes aggravated, instead of hanging up on them, please forward the call to me."

Of course depending on the severity of the situation, further repercussions may be warranted. Remember to remain informative, share facts, and avoid emotion.

Take the "ouch" out of corrections by inserting the magical remedy - information!



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LOOKING AHEAD:

◆ The September issue of The Exchange will focus on Performance Evaluation.

LOOKING BACK:

- ◆ For previous editions of The Exchange, go to our [back issues](#).
- ◆ Re-read the [04/2001](#) edition: **Difficult Communications**.

**Tell me and I'll forget;
show me and I may remember;
involve me and I'll understand.**

Chinese Proverb

What Our Clients Are Saying

"I don't believe my career would be advancing at the same pace if it weren't for the communication training I received from TLC. The evidence is the change in my reviews from pre - 'Talk Is NOT Cheap!' to post - 'Talk Is NOT Cheap!'"

Amy Gayle, Atlanta GA



Helpful Hints:

- **Corrections are better received when you have frequently given informative compliments in the past.**
- **Guidance begins with asking rather than telling.**

Correction does much, but encouragement does more.

Johann Wolfgang von Goethe



To learn more about it, click here!

SHOWING THE WAY

By Ben Cairns, M.A.

"Guidance" comes from the Old French word *guider*, "to show the way." The ability "to show the way" is an essential skill for exemplary managers and leaders. Guidance is the gentle nudge that keeps things going in the right direction.



How do you give guidance? It is similar to the "ask-tell-ask" strategy that Beverly outlines in her column (see page 3). You ask what has happened, what the person knows, and perhaps how they are planning to proceed. Instead of telling the person the consequences, you can instead be helpfully informative while offering a recommendation or suggestion.

Guidance can be gentle and supportive, or it can be more blunt and unfiltered. The key is to start with the more gentle approach. Assume a helpful tone of voice. Lower your volume, gently vary your pitch, and lower your pitch toward the end of the exchange. Use neutral body language (tilt your head, smile, relax your posture and movements). Helpful wording might include phrases like "a way of doing this that has been successful for others is to..."

There are occasionally cases where the blunt approach is warranted because the friendlier approach has not worked. This is sometimes called the "two-by-four" or "kick-in-the-seat-of-the-pants" approach. The blunt approach easily blurs into a correction, so make sure to try the gentler approach first!

Corrections occur after a mistake has been made. Consider this alternative: if the appropriate amount of guidance is given mid-course, later corrections might not be necessary at all. Remember, "Show the way before things go astray!"

THE IMPORTANCE OF WORDS

Daniel Webster once reported that if all his skills were taken from him with the exception of one, he would choose to keep his communication, for with it he could regain all the rest. In the fast-paced world of e-mail, fax machines, and voice mail, communication becomes a core skill to be perfected by every person striving for success in the world

of business. Even with all our advanced technology, remember that businesses do not do business with other people; rather, people do business with other people.

In our daily conversations, we sometimes fail to take time to compose our words carefully. Common errors include words that confuse or create defensiveness. Following is a list of TroubleWords® that may create defensiveness:

- **You** – When used as the subject, it can sound accusatory. An example is, "You said..." Instead, replace "you" with "I" ("I understood...") or leave off the personal pronoun ("It was discussed...").
- **But** – This word negates whatever came before it. "I like your idea, but it will cost too much." Replace the "but" with a pause or make two sentences ("I like your idea. What about the cost?")
- **Try** – This word can suggest a lack of committed action. Instead of saying, "I'll try," tell the individual exactly what you will do. "I will call the customer, explain our delay, and ask for an extended deadline."
- **Must** – This implies control. Omit this word and state the importance. Instead of, "You must call today," state, "Calling the client today will save the account."
- **Always/never/everyone/no one** – These all inclusive/exclusive words decrease believability. Replace with the information that you have. Instead of, "They always object," say, "They have objected the last three times."
- **Should** – This can produce guilt rather than action. Instead of, "You should..." replace with a question such as, "What if you...?"
- **Maybe/kind of/sort of/possibly** – These "wishy-washy" words decrease trust in the information you give. Get off the fence and take a stand on one side of the issue.

Mr. Webster was correct. By developing effective communication, the rest of our skills can be obtained. It does not merely enhance leadership and business success; rather communication is the foundation upon which we build. It's okay to use every modern convenience available, as long as you remember that people do business with people. Connect with them through the correct use of words.

CEO CORNER: Ask. Tell. Ask.

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, MA CCC-SLP

Giving someone a correction is not much fun. Receiving one is even less enjoyable. I do not have to rely upon my memory to realize the sting of corrections; I received one last week.

I deserved to be corrected. I did not call someone within the time frame that was established. I immediately accepted responsibility and listened very carefully to make sure that I would not make another error. I used a Paraprobe® to verify that I understood the current request. The whole episode took approximately 90 seconds. It took 90 minutes for me to restore my emotional balance.

Even though I preach that we should look back upon mistakes only long enough to learn from them, I admit that I took a couple minutes to beat myself up. Missing a deadline does not sit well with me and it is unacceptable for me to be the one missing it.

After a few mental chastisements, my training kicked in. I realized what I could do to make restitution and took that action. I sharpened my focus and planned ahead. I convinced myself that good results would come from my recovery.

Still, I was troubled. All of my reasons for missing the deadline were valid, yet not acceptable. That wasn't the problem. Falling upon my sword was something I had done before, so neither was that the source of my angst. Then I realized that the correction came out of the blue and I was not given the opportunity to explain. I was relieved to have identified what was bothering me.

When correcting someone, I recommend the Ask-Tell-Ask process. Of course, do your homework first to make sure you are informed correctly. Then let the individual know when and what you want to discuss. Begin the conversation with a StartProbe® that begins with "what" or "how." Something like, "How come I did not receive a call from you in June?" or "Regarding the frequency of calls, what was your understanding of our agreement?"

Had I been asked one of those questions, I would have owned my error and corrected myself. Even if that did not happen, being asked to speak focuses a person's attention on the matter and not on becoming defensive and

shutting down listening. So, **ask** first.

After listening to the person's answer, **tell** him/her the consequence of their action. Make it short and stick to the information. There is nothing personal here, just the facts. Quickly follow this with another question that **asks** for a solution. Examples may be, "So, what will you do to ensure this doesn't happen again?" or "What can you do to improve this process?"

We all make mistakes. To increase the odds that the person will survive the correction with his or her self-esteem as well as a plan to succeed in the future, remember to Ask-Tell-Ask. A correct correction will help you to live your dreams!

FEATURED SERVICE: Tele-Conference Training This Fall

TLC will continue to offer our most popular topics in convenient one-hour phone conferences. If your budgets are tight, this is an inexpensive way to bring quality training to people in new positions. Just \$25 a person* includes the training and materials.



In September: **"How to Communicate With Anyone!"**

- September 8, noon EDT
- September 10, 2:00 p.m. EDT
- September 18, 10:00 a.m. EDT

In October, **"Improve Your Listening!"**

- October 6, noon EDT
- October 10, 10:00 a.m. EDT
- October 15, 2:00 p.m. EDT

To register, simply call in advance to reserve your spot: 1-888-BECAUSE. We will need the name, contact information of the participant and method of payment (credit card, check, purchase order, or verbal agreement with current clients.)

*Plus the long distance rate from your long distance provider.



Remember to:

- **Correct in private.**
- **Give information rather than opinions.**
- **Avoid TroubleWords® (Reference: Talk Is NOT Cheap!).**

General Dwight D. Eisenhower used a simple device to illustrate the art of leadership. Laying an ordinary piece of string on a table, he'd illustrate how you could easily pull it in any direction. "Try and push it, though," he cautioned, "and it won't go anywhere. It's just that way when it comes to leading people."

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TLC establishes long-term relationships with our clients. If we have helped you or if you believe our approach to change would work for someone you know, please communicate with us by email [tlc@talklisten.com] or phone [1-888-232-2873]. We work with individuals and groups on the following subject areas: attitude, listening, body language, voice, leadership, compliments and corrections, behavioral style, teamwork, effective meetings, public speaking, accent reduction and much more!