

THE EXCHANGE

This issue's featured subject is "Gaining Commitments."

GET TO THE POINT/ASK CLEARLY

Ben Cairns, M.A.

Armand Hammer, the American capitalist who advised the Soviet government as it made its way toward a more American-style economy, rocked the empire with a simple statement: "Nothing happens until something is sold." Hammer had a way of getting to the point clearly and saying things that made a difference. He gained the commitment of the Soviets and changed the world.

"The person who asks the questions controls the conversation" is an old sales and interpersonal communication maxim that is well suited for this month's newsletter theme of "Gaining Commitment." The truth is that you can control a conversation only if you can get to the point and ask the right questions. Here are some recommendations for being more effective when you need to gain commitment:

Get to the Point. Learn to condense your verbiage into shorter, more easily understood statements. You can always give more information for those who ask for it.

How to do it: Practice bulleting your main points into single, simple sentences. "Our training will save significant time and money for your team" is better than a rambling dialogue about how you implement your service and what the logistical details include. You lose approximately 46% of the population after three sentences. The other 54% will want more information. After you have given them a summary sentence, they will understand how the information you are sharing supports your conclusion.

If condensing is hard for you, practice this technique: summarize your presentation into a short summary form, much like the abstract for a journal article. Then, create bullet points from the abstract. Look at your bullets and see



how you can more generally state your point. Share the main point first and see if more information is needed.

Clean up Your Questions. Clean questions are easier to answer. The technique is to shorten or lengthen your question.

How to do it: Shorten your questions the way a journalist pares back text. Eliminate intensifiers ("very," "significantly," "much more," etc.). Use specifics instead of general terms ("twenty five percent" instead of "a whole lot"). Do this exercise: write out the kinds of questions that you typically ask and then rewrite them in shorter and shorter fashion. Write the same question at least five ways to explore the best option. Make them shorter each time. We habitually verbalize questions in old patterns that can be refined on paper first, and then verbally refined with practice.

Lengthen your questions by setting up the question with information first; then ask a short, clear question at the end. Giving information before you ask a question eliminates confusion and gives your listener a better chance to commit with more certainty. For example, "We can offer option A or option B. A is more effective, takes more time, and costs more. Option B is less effective, but it can be implemented quickly and at half the cost. Which option works best for you?"

Once you have the information that you need, make sure to use a good ParaProbe® to secure final understanding and commitment (see the article, "Confirming Understanding," on page 2 of this issue). Think of Armand Hammer cutting through generations of fuzzy Soviet thinking with his get-to-the-point way of speaking. You too can gain commitment and change the world!

What Our Clients Are Saying

"I attended the symposium and enjoyed Beverly's presentation very much. I bought her book and read half of it on the flight back to Denver!! This week, I started putting some of her suggestions into practice and it really works. I now have a much better idea of how to communicate with different types of people."

Brian Starck, Denver CO



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LOOKING AHEAD:

◆ The November issue of *The Exchange* will focus on Reducing Defensiveness.

LOOKING BACK:

◆ For previous editions of *The Exchange*, go to our [back issues](#).

◆ Re-read the [01/2001 edition: Keeping Promises](#).

Unless commitment is made, there are only promises and hopes... but no plans.

Peter F. Drucker



Helpful Hints:

- Under-promise and over-deliver.
- Treat appointments with co-workers with the respect that you would treat meeting a close friend.

Commitment unlocks the doors of imagination, allows vision, and gives us the "right stuff" to turn our dreams into reality.

James Womack



To learn more about it, click here!

CONFIRMING UNDERSTANDING

Vincent Ivan Phipps, B.S.

Have you ever had the following conversation?

Person A: I need that information ASAP.

Person B: O.K.

Person A: Everything has to be done differently than last time.

Person B: I know.

Person A: Can I have it by next week?

Person B: Sure.

Person A: Great! I am glad we are on the same page.

Person B: Me, too.

Let's analyze the ambiguity of this exchange. The following words are vague: "ASAP," "everything," "differently," "last time," "next week," and "same." Although someone could argue that each person understands the other person's meaning, use of these non-specific terms leaves room for potential miscommunications.

So how do you really confirm that a message was received and understood by all parties involved? You use a tool called a ParaProbe®. Similar to a paraphrase, where you summarize what a person said using the words they used, a ParaProbe® is a tool used in the form of a question in which you restate what the other person said **using your own words**.

In the example above, Person B concluded with "Me, too." Using a ParaProbe®, he/she would have instead said: "Let me make sure that we are on the same page. What you would like from me is the location of the building, driving directions, and the meeting agenda, along with a contact person's name and email address and you need it by noon Tuesday. Is that right?"

Notice how this time B clarified the vague information from A? Also notice how at the end of the ParaProbe®, the hook question, "Is that right?" was added. There are several other questions you could use such as; "Did I get everything?" "Is that what you mean?" "Are we in agreement?" etc.

Even if B would have said something different than what A expected, this is A's opportunity to modify. For example, A may have responded, "Oh no, the meeting is Tuesday morning. So I would need that information by 5:00 p.m. Monday."

You win either way when you confirm using a ParaProbe®. The only way to incorrectly use a ParaProbe® is to not use it at all and walk away hoping that your assumptions are the same as the other person's expectations. Assume less and ask more.

ONE, TWO, THREE STRIKES YOU WIN!

Think of all the times you have asked a question and the other person did not answer. Perhaps you got the silent treatment or they dodged the question and began talking about something else. When this happens to you, what do you do?

If you are like most people, you may abandon the question and either answer it yourself or change the question. That is like playing baseball with a single strikeout rule. Like the American pastime, take advantage of the number three.

There are basically three reasons that people do not answer questions:

1. They don't know the answer.
2. They don't want to tell you the answer.
3. They don't understand the question.

The next time someone does not answer your question, use a TLC tool called Triple Probe®. Ask the same question with slightly different words up to three times. Here is an example:

1. What do you **think** about the new training?
2. What are your **thoughts** about the time management course?
3. What **reaction** do you have from the seminar today?

Notice that the words (verbs) in bold can be exchanged for one another just as the underlined words can be substituted. By using similar, yet different words, it is not obvious that you are asking the same question.

Let's go back to the reasons that people don't answer questions. If they don't know the answer to the first question, because the second one is practically the same question, it buys them time to think of the answer. If they don't want to tell you the answer, by the time you get to the third one, they will probably figure that you're not going to give up and will therefore, at least, give you a partial answer. If they didn't understand the first question, by using different words, it gives the advantage of clearing up confusion.

So, getting an answer (an early step to gaining commitment) is as simple as 1-2-3. Don't give up after one question. If it was worth asking, it is worth getting an answer. One, two, three questions and you win!



NAILING DOWN A COMMITMENT



Remember the last time you “nailed down” a commitment? This commonly used expression means to conclusively settle something. It is essential to “nail down” the commitments that you

make or gain.

So, what do “nails” have to do with your commitments? This nautical term dates back to the 1700’s. During rough sails, heavier equipment such as survival supplies, lifeboats, cannons, cannon balls, etc. were nailed to the floorboards of the ship with railroad like spikes. Even in the toughest conditions, the items nailed down would remain in place until the rough sailing was over. Today when we refer to, “nailing down” something, or say, “I nailed it!” we are referring to the successful completion of a project or task.

This month, make a conscious effort to follow through on everything you have made a commitment to do. What promises have you not yet fulfilled? What tasks have you not yet done? Don’t let rough waters hinder your progress. Hammer away and nail down your commitments to get a firmer grip on your life!

WE HEAR WHAT WE LISTEN FOR

Two men were walking along a crowded sidewalk in a downtown business area. Suddenly, one exclaimed, “Listen to the lovely sound of that cricket.” But, the other could not hear. He asked his companion how he could detect the sound of a cricket amid the din of people and traffic. The first man, who was a zoologist, had trained himself to listen to the voice of nature. But he didn’t explain. He simply took a coin out of his pocket and dropped it to the sidewalk, whereupon a dozen people began to look about them. “We hear,” he said, “what we listen for.”

What are you listening for and what are you hearing?



ASK THE EXPERTS



Dear TLC,

My job requires dependence on another department and I am getting sick and tired of their tardiness negatively affecting my professional reputation. I’m trying not to tattle, but....

End of My Rope

Dear End,

Since you probably tried conversations in the past, we recommend using a Word Picture. That is where you practice a story that will capture the emotional interest of the other party. Then make the analogy of how that story is like your work situation. You can read all about Word Pictures in a book titled, *Language of Love*, by Gary Smalley and John Trent, or give us a call at TLC.

FEATURED SERVICE: New Book Available

Our CEO, Beverly Inman-Ebel, has co-authored a new book titled, *Real World Communication Strategies That Work*, by Insight Publishing. Everything from communicating at home to formal presentations, from humor to conflict, and networking are here with strategies to help you become more effective. For your autographed copy, just call TLC at 888-Because (232-2873). Price: \$19.95 plus shipping.

Before you are tempted to give up or get discouraged, remember all success is based on long term commitment, faith, discipline, attitude, and a few stepping stones along the way. You might not like the stone you are on right now, but it’s sure to be one of the stones that lead to great opportunities in the future.

Jim Rohn



Remember to...

- Ask open questions and wait for the response.
- Ask the other person to state what they think the agreement is.

**Anyone can be an ACE:
Attitude + Commitment
= Excellence**

Robert Inman

It was character that got us out of bed, commitment that moved us to action, and discipline that enabled us to follow through.

Zig Ziglar



The glory of friendship is not the outstretched hand, nor the kindly smile, nor the joy of companionship; it is the spiritual inspiration that comes to one when he discovers that someone else believes in him and is willing to trust him.

Ralph Waldo Emerson

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CEO CORNER: "More Than Tools"

By Beverly Inman-Ebel, MA CCC-SLP

People who let us down can be the catalysts for disappointment, frustration, and denied dreams. Before we place all this blame upon them, let's examine how we develop trust with people, for trust is the foundation of commitment.

August found me in Colorado Springs walking through the Garden of the Gods with two new friends about six a.m. The red rock formations were inspiring to me, bathed with the rays of the morning sun set in the clear blue sky. We came upon one rock that was joined at the base and divided into three spires reaching towards the heavens. There was a ledge about fifteen feet from the ground.

The massive object reminded me of the strength of God in the presentation of the Father, Son, and Holy Ghost, so, of course I wanted to sit upon the ledge and be cradled in the rock. Anyone who has ever hiked with me knows that I am a big klutz. Had these new friends had that information, they may have encouraged me to keep my feet on the ground and just take a picture. Since they were uninformed, I climbed up and then became fearful because I could not reach the ledge. They told me to hug the rock to change my center of balance. With this direction and a strong determination to overcome my fear, I reached the ledge.

Everything was wonderful until I had to come down. Retreating my passage was not something I wanted to do. I was going to take my chances jumping but my 52-year old knees asked me to reconsider. My friends joined their arms and stood well below my feet telling me to place my foot and all my weight upon them. With my back to the rock, there was nothing to hold on to. This stopped me short. I admitted to them that I was a certified control freak and that I needed to know what the next step was going to be before I took the first step. They

looked up at me and said two simple words, "Trust us."

If I had been younger, I would have jumped. If I had been more coordinated, I would have left the way I came. Instead, I took a step of faith and trust brought me to the ground effortlessly.

I believe the best thing we can fix in Corporate America is to re-establish trust. We don't need to be on a ledge alone. We can all lend a hand (or arm) to someone, not because it is our responsibility, but because it is the right thing to do.

Today, help someone who is in a tight place. Building relationships is what fosters commitments. I bet there are people in your life that you would do almost anything for in order not to let them down. I bet those are people that you trust. Help. Build. Trust. Live your dreams!



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!

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