Not Because I Said So

Encouraging Your Team To Speak Up

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Milgram on Obedience
Series of experiments in the 1960s by Stanley Milgram

Measured the willingness of study participants to obey an authority figure who instructed them to perform acts conflicting with their personal conscience

Experiment roles: Experimenter (authority figure), Learner (an actor), Teacher (the participant)

Voltage increased in 15-volt increments for each wrong answer up to “450 volts.”
Learner acted more visibly distressed as the corrections increased.

Experimenter verbally encouraged volunteer to continue.

**QUESTION:** What percentage of the “teachers” do you think administered “shock” to their students up to the highest level?
In first experiment, 65 percent of participants “administered” the experiment's top 450-volt shock, though many were very uncomfortable about performing this.
The Challenges

♦ Following procedures blindly without considering risks can be dangerous.
♦ We want employees to speak up instead of simply following orders.
Let’s Call a Meeting to Solve This

♦ Not so fast!
♦ Face to face meetings are good for making reports and can serve to build trust.
♦ However…
Studies on Group Interaction
Asch Conformity Experiments

♦ Directed by Solomon Asch in the 1950s that demonstrated the degree to which an individual's own opinions are influenced by those of a majority group (many variations performed)

♦ Initial study:
  – 7 confederates, one test subject
  – 18 trials with 12 having confederates answer incorrectly

For a listing of articles:
http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Asch_conformity_experiments
Asch, Cont.

- Perceptual questions
- Subject answered last or close to last
- Control: individuals tested alone

QUESTION: What would you predict the error rate to be?
Control: error rate less than 1%
Test: error rate was 1/3 with at least 75% of the subjects answering at least one question wrong
Interviews afterward suggested that some subjects (very few) believed the confederates; more chose to answer incorrectly to conform.

Everyone just wants to fit in!
“Can you connect with me now? How the presence of mobile Communication technology influences face-to-face conversation quality” - Andrew K. Przybylski and Netta Weinstein (2012)

2 Experiments:
- Random pairings of participants
- Conversation with cell phone or notebook present (non-obtrusive)
- Interaction quality rated

Full Article: http://spr.sagepub.com/content/early/2012/07/17/0265407512453827
♦ Study conclusion: “the mere presence of mobile communication technology might interfere with human relationship formation.”
♦ My take-away: Cell phone presence may further reduce the effectiveness of our meetings.
Other Studies

- Talkative people may be perceived as smarter and better leaders
- Computer based collaboration versus face to face collaboration in idea generation
Introverts <-> Extroverts

- Continuum, sometimes situational
- Introverts are not necessarily shy
- Key identifying characteristic – how a person becomes energized
- Introverts are 25-50% of our population
- Possibly higher amount of introverts in the electric utility industry?
Solutions?
Company-Wide Mechanisms to Encourage Reporting

- Means for anonymous suggestion reporting and email suggestions
- Regular employee engagement surveys
- Safety program which gives points for reporting unsafe conditions
Now, Let’s Get Personal

• If you are a talkative person, pipe down and practice listening!
• In a group meeting, let newer (or less senior) members provide ideas first.
• Use the fast food rule (3 part communication).
• Allow your team to have control of their work.
• Put the cell phone away during meetings!
• Understand your audience:
  – Introverts and extroverts
  – Explore best options for interaction

“Most people do not listen with the intent to understand; they listen with the intent to reply.” -- Stephen R. Covey
What I learned from dog training

♦ Punishment in any form reduces spontaneous offerings of new behaviors.
  – There must be no fear of reprisal for employees to feel comfortable making suggestions or reporting concerns.

♦ Reward in increments. Training dogs involves successive approximations.
  – Acknowledge and thank employees for all sincere input regardless of whether the input appears useful.
And most importantly…

♦ ACT on concerns and suggestions provided.
♦ If you choose not to act, explain why.
♦ Avoid the idea black hole!
In other words… RESPECT
Wrap Up

♦ Let’s share ideas on getting more input from employees.
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♦ Recommended reading:
  – *Quiet: The Power of Introverts in a World That Can't Stop Talking* by Susan Cain
  – *Inviting Disaster: Lessons From the Edge of Technology* by James R. Chiles