



Learning to Talk Results

I remember when it happened to me. I was sitting across the desk from my boss, not too long after I had been promoted to business manager. After days of analysis, I was handing him a detailed description of a competitive encroachment, which with our cost structure, would stand in the way of me, and my business, meeting our profit objective.

I expected him to rave about how great my data was and how well I had explained the problem. After a careful read, he shocked me by saying “This looks like a very through description of the situation. Now what are you going to do about it?” a question that rings in my ears to this day. A question that changed my world from being a reporter and bystander in the business to someone who was responsible for results.

By learning to “talk results,” I recognized that no matter what my role in an organization, I was responsible in some way for its business outcomes. Successful employees learn to talk results and see themselves as a fully participating ally in the business, rather than just a worker. Failure to talk results often stalls careers, with the employee never understanding what derailed their advancement.

I was recently with a client who was complaining that the young people in his organization left him unimpressed. To paraphrase him “they don’t show me anything. They seem so disengaged. They just do their jobs, no more, no less.”

But I had had a chance to talk to these younger employees and knew that their jobs matter very much to them. In fact, they want to learn and highly value growth within their jobs whether they decide to stay with an employer or not. They just didn’t have a clue about how to present the insight provided by their jobs, or more accurately, to even look for insight within their often routine assignments, in a way that would have value to a senior leader. They didn’t even know that how they were presenting themselves and their job output was deemed lacking.

And let me be clear, the problem is not just in younger workers. I have coached many an experienced person on these same issues.

Now because of that mentoring boss many years ago, and some new relationships, I’ve had the chance to understand what management needs from the organization. That helps

me tailor my communications in a way that my ideas and perspectives get heard and taken seriously. I also have the benefit of individual learning tools, such as the DiSC, that give me insight into how I think and communicate, and what about my natural approach to the work may need to be adapted to build an effective, respectful relationship with an executive I'm supporting.

And the training to enable people to get to this awareness, and to then present information in the "risk-reward" framework that business leaders are looking for, is unique and specialized.

The good news is that such training doesn't have to be burdensome. A half-day course can go a long way to helping employees understand the type of information executives need for their decision making and maybe more importantly, their values and their focus. These are laid out very well in a book called Five Minutes with VITO by David Mattson and Anthony Parinello, a book that tracks my personal experience of dealing with executives.

Included in the workshop would be a few hours spent with DiSC, a behavior style self-assessment, that provides amazing insight into how we, based on our view of our environment and our sense of personal power, respond to risk and change, two fundamental concepts executives seek to manage every day.

Both sides of the equation could be brought together in several case studies, where participants have to analyze a business situation and practice pulling out the relevant facts, then presenting their case for action to the "executive."

Such training would set expectations and give employees an all-important peek into senior management's head. It would deepen employees' understanding of their value to the company, and increase their sense of belonging, and encourage innovation. As HR professionals we struggle with many "people puzzles" in our organizations, but none more so than developing the next generation of leaders and getting a seat at the table because we provide value to the C-suite.

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September, 2009