

THE CHANGE CHALLENGE.....A Newsletter About Leadership

February 1, 2014

Issue: 65



DICK STIEGLITZ, PhD
Business Consultant, Author
and Executive Coach

Welcome to the February edition of *The Change Challenge*. Recently, several scandals have made headlines and the leader of the organization said he was unaware of the abhorrent behaviors. That's the theme of this month's feature article titled "**What's Happening in Your Organization?**"

The *Leading Change* article titled "**Leaders Ask Questions**" suggests that effective leaders often ask probing questions to enable their people to choose appropriate actions. The *Results through Relationships* article titled "**Catching the Ball**" likens communications to throwing and catching a ball - both ends have to work in order for the link to succeed.

Your feedback and recommendations to improve this newsletter are always appreciated via return email or *The Change Blog* at www.dickstieglitz.com. Because of my vacation far away from the cold in Washington, there will be no issue of *The Change Challenge* in March.

Until April,
Dick Stieglitz

This Month's Articles

[What's Happening in Your Organization?](#)

[Leaders Ask Questions](#)

[Catching the Ball](#)

[Leadership Conversations](#)

[Buying & Selling a Company](#)

WHAT'S HAPPENING IN YOUR ORGANIZATION?

"I start with the premise that the purpose of leadership is to produce more leaders, not more followers." - Ralph Nader

When asked about the health-care website crash, President Obama said: "I didn't write the code." Nor does anyone expect him to - but leaders are expected to build organizations that get things done. Even after five years in power, the Obama administration's weak leadership conversations at times leave the President knowing too little about things that matter most. In addition to the website fiasco, Obama says he was unaware that the NSA eavesdropped on world leaders or that the IRS applied extraordinary tax scrutiny to conservative groups. Like many executives, Obama prefers an inspirational speech to building a plan, and relishes grandiose reform more than incremental change. These situations raise doubts about whether Obama knows what is happening in his administration and the federal bureaucracy he manages. Does he routinely get the information required to lead? Is he asking the right questions? Do you?

Same in New Jersey. Like Obama, New Jersey Governor Christie also endured the worst month of his five years in office. Christie claimed not to know that his top aides intentionally created massive traffic jams by closing access lanes to the George Washington Bridge as political retaliation to a local mayor. He immediately fired the aides but the incident raises doubts about his ability to assemble a leadership team. Even if Christie didn't participate in the lane closures or the cover-up, he failed to build a culture where everyone knew that politically motivated actions were unacceptable.

What's Happening inside Your Organization? Do you really know? Is it necessary for a leader to know everything that's happening? Unless you lead a small organization, the answer to the last question is: "No. It's impractical and inefficient to know everything." When you give your people specific goals, clear criteria, and unwavering principles to guide their actions, you don't have to know everything that is happening because it will happen according to your standards for what is appropriate.

Baseline Conversations. The standards you set must balance the competing demands of growth, profitability, social responsibility, and learning. Tell your people what you expect relative to collaborating with others, environmentally sustainable practices, and accepting the often higher cost of those two approaches. For example, one business owner assigned a top performer to sell a new service. A few months later, he complained "she's not doing a good job." When asked what constituted a good job, he stammered and said: "I don't know. I just expected more than I'm getting." The baseline conversation that ensued set monthly goals, defined innovative service strategies, and allocated promotional resources. When the goals were achieved, he said: "She's the best promotion I ever made - especially now that I'm a better leader."

An Ocean of Information. Like President Obama, Governor Christie and almost every other executive, you are afloat in an ocean of information. Each day you struggle to separate the useful from the irrelevant in the information tsunami. Just as you seek a healthy food diet, you must refine your information diet to focus on decisions about the most critical matters. Making information choices is difficult today because of the increasing number of web sites, emails, e-letters (like this one), books, and other types of information you receive. One way to obtain actionable information is to ask the right questions.

Asking Questions. Asking questions doesn't come naturally.

Designated by Amazon as one of the 10-best new management & leadership books

LEADERSHIP CONVERSATIONS

CHALLENGING HIGH-POTENTIAL MANAGERS TO BECOME GREAT LEADERS



ALAN S. BERSON
RICHARD G. STIEGLITZ

[CLICK HERE TO ORDER](#)

Whether you are newly-promoted, a veteran of the C-suite, or somewhere in between, your most powerful tool is the ability to touch people's hearts and minds through effective conversations. Rich with real-world examples and useful ideas, *Leadership Conversations* is a must-read for high-achieving managers looking to reach the next level and leaders striving to develop others.

Buying or selling a business can be a lucrative but risky transaction

IF YOU'VE OWNED, BOUGHT, OR SOLD A BUSINESS, YOU'VE KNOWLEDGE, THE MOST VALUABLE ASSET IN BILLIONS OF DOLLARS TO YOU

EXPENSIVE MISTAKES

WHEN BUYING & SELLING COMPANIES

...AND HOW TO AVOID THEM IN YOUR DEALS



Executives are usually more comfortable telling people what to do. Obama and Christie, for example, should have asked probing questions of their key aides to determine what was really happening in their organizations. Our academic training hard wires us to answer questions. Teachers asked questions and success was measured by how well we answered them. And when we entered the business world, supervisors were more directive than inquiring. Ask the hard questions of your people and encourage them to do the same to you. When you feel you know all there is to know, there's at least one more question you can ask: *"What other question should I ask?"* That question often elicits overlooked information that modifies decisions.

Leadership Accountability. The questions that leaders ask define goals, clarify criteria for decisions, and set boundaries for acceptable behaviors. Ask yourself: *"To what extent do I and other executives follow the rules and hold each other accountable to those rules?"* For example, if a leader doesn't want subordinates to make politically motivated decisions, then his decisions shouldn't be politically motivated. Industry leaders have special challenges in this area because they operate in uncharted waters. Their people must make on-the-spot decisions when circumstances are radically different from past experiences. Nonetheless, they must be held accountable for results of those decisions. As a leader, your job is to build a culture that holds people accountable for results and the criteria they use to make decisions.

Clear Communications. Under most circumstances, your key assistants do what they believe you want them to do. If you have communicated clear guidelines, you can be confident that things will be done in the prescribed manner. For example, Obama's appointees and Christie's aides thought they were doing what the boss wanted by making life difficult for political opponents - they mimicked their bosses' behavior. Since you communicate with more people, more often, in more ways than ever before, your leadership conversations must include probing questions and clear guidelines. You don't need to know everything that is happening in your organization, but you should know the guidelines your people will use to make decisions and take action when you aren't there.

Leading Change LEADERS ASK QUESTIONS

"Millions saw the apple fall, but Newton was the one who asked why?" - Bernard Baruch

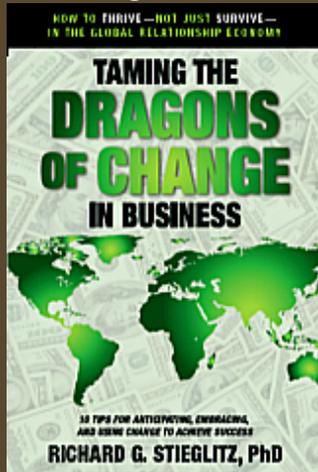
Remember when your mom complained: *"Everything I tell you goes in one ear and out the other."* Well, in a neurologic sense she was correct. If she had asked questions instead, you would have retained more of her messages. That's because the brain operates with skepticism: tell it what to do and it will analyze the implications. On the other hand, the brain processes questions as if they were problems to solved - games to played.

Richard G. Stieglitz, PhD
Stuart H. Sorokin, JD, LL.M., CPA

**CLICK BOOK COVER TO
ORDER FROM
AMAZON.COM**

A popular maxim says average people learn from their mistakes, stupid people repeat their mistakes, and brilliant people learn from the mistakes of others. This book is designed to move you toward the brilliant category among business owners who buy and sell privately-held companies.

**Looking to have your
organization embrace
change in 2014**



**CLICK BOOK COVER TO
ORDER FROM
AMAZON.COM**

The recession, sequestration, new technologies, acquisitions, and intense competition have produced a world of constant change. Today, ideas travel at the speed of light. You can communicate with anyone, anywhere, at any time, on any

Similarly, our employees like solving problems like you do. Subject. To stay on top, you must do more than react. You must anticipate, embrace, and use change to your advantage

Similarly, their brains release neurotransmitters that act like adrenaline.

The leadership lesson here is to ask questions and let your people choose rather than telling them what to do, how to do it, and when it must be done. Leaders use questions to stimulate innovation, while managers spend much of their time answering how-to questions. For a leader, questions are more than a source of information. They are an efficient and effective way to gather feedback, ensure that things are on-track, and adjust goals.

If you ask your people the right questions, you usually won't have to tell them what to do because they'll figure it out. At appropriate junctures in conversations, share your views so others know what you are thinking and why. But also ask questions that encourage people to think in new ways. You might use close-ended questions if your objective is to drive the conversation to a conclusion. But use them carefully since they can be seen as an attempt to grab control. Finally, use questions to identify and explore options that may not have been obvious to anyone, including you. In most leadership situations, questions produce more commitment and better results than directives.

Results Through Relationships **CATCHING THE BALL**

You'll know you are inspiring others when you set a big goal and your people inundate you with innovative ideas to achieve it. If it feels like you're alone in the goal, you probably are.

The topic at a CXO forum was communications. The floor of the meeting room was littered with three-inch diameter plastic balls. During his opening remarks, the speaker casually picked up the balls and threw them to CXOs in the audience with the following results:

- One CXO wasn't looking. The ball hit him on the chest and dropped to the floor (*not listening*)
- Another CXO tried to intercept a ball intended for another CXO and it fell to the floor (*interrupting*)
- The ball thrown to a third CXO went far to the right and was uncatchable (*garbled message*)
- One CXO fumbled the ball and dropped it on the floor (*misunderstanding*)
- Most CXOs were focused on the speaker and easily caught balls that were thrown their direction (*effective communications*)

Like throwing and catching a ball, communication involves sending a message that is understood. The tossed balls represented several ways that communications can fail.

Communications, always the life blood of business, are even more vital today. When the Pony Express carried messages across the country, the trip could take weeks. The telegraph was faster, but impractical for large messages. Today, the Internet transmits documents instantaneously around the world. But deals still get messed up, projects get delayed, and employees take ineffective actions because of untimely, inaccurate or incomplete communications. Effective communications provide clear goals and direction, deliver timely information in a useable form, and motivate action. How effectively are communications with your colleagues, your superiors, your suppliers, and your clients? If those relationships are not working well, weak communications may be the cause. Who's dropping the ball and why is it being dropped?

subject. To stay on top, you must do more than react. You must anticipate, embrace, and use change to your advantage

THAT'S WHAT THIS BOOK IS ALL ABOUT!

QUICKLINKS

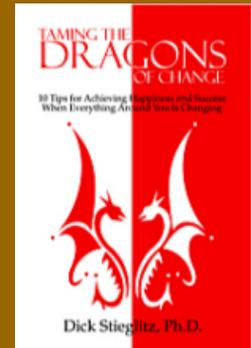
[Dick Stieglitz's Website](#)

[Dragons Of Change Website](#)

[Presentations & Workshops](#)

[The Change Blog!](#)

ORDER DICK'S BOOK ON PERSONAL CHANGE



TAMING THE DRAGONS OF CHANGE
10 Tips For Achieving Happiness and Success When Everything Around You Is Changing
CLICK BOOK COVER TO ORDER THROUGH AMAZON.COM

[**Join Our Mailing List!**](#)