

Talent Development 34 Encourage Dialog

by Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD



Section 3.3 in the CPTD Certification program for ATD is Organization and Culture. Skill Statement D has “Skill in creating a culture which encourages and/or creates opportunities for dialog and feedback between individuals and groups, for example designing collaborative work practices and/or spaces, and role modeling effective feedback techniques.”

This article will highlight some techniques that can lead to excellent dialog in organizations and allow the free flow of information. Recognize that communication methods and patterns are significantly different in the post COVID-19 world, so new challenges and opportunities will unfold for some time.

Clarify Your Intentions

The first order of business is to ensure all groups are aligned behind a solid Strategy with Common Values and Expected Behaviors. It is vital for there to be a common understanding of how people will interact and be respectful of each other. Leaders need to create a culture of support in which all people feel included. When these critical components are missing or weak, it allows silos of power to emerge. These silos work against open communication and create inter-organizational stress and loss of trust.

Look at the Physical Plant

Often organizations with conventional cubicle or office structures suffer from poor communication that is encouraged by the layout. Consider open architecture where people can see each other and interface easily. Many organizations are moving toward these open environments, but there are downsides. It is harder to focus in an open environment, and some people experience a lack of privacy.

In a hybrid world, where some people are working remotely, it is necessary to increase communication so that people do not become disconnected from the flow of information.

It is particularly important that everyone receives the same information so that you do not foster an environment of “haves” and “have-nots.” People working from home have the additional burden of being required to focus on work issues while there may be chaos even within the same room. Trying to focus on the flood of emails is equally daunting. Get creative with ways to keep things going without having distractions at home. Sometimes additional help is useful.

Build a Culture of Trust

The concept of trust is extremely powerful in terms of having people work well together. I believe the most important aspect of building trust between people and groups is to ensure psychological safety, where people know they will not be punished for voicing their opinions.

In some cultures, people feel stifled and not able to share their opinions without negative consequences. The thrust to improve Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion in most organizations is one way to help all people feel invited to share their thoughts, yet in these same cultures people can still feel stifled.

Work to build respect and a fondness between people that will enhance the trust and move quickly to repair any damaged trust regardless of the source.

Try for a Variety of Work Experiences

When people feel locked into a single working configuration over extended periods of time, they become calcified and rigid. Work to liven up the culture where the work flow has some spice and fluidity. This practice not only lowers the tendency for boredom, it also lowers the potential for cliques or silos to emerge.

Take the time to have some fun along the way; it really helps the culture blossom.

Recognize People and Teams doing Good Work

Recognition goes a long way toward creating an open culture. The only caveat here is to be sure the reinforcement is proportional to the effort and results. If one group feels slighted by lack of recognition, it can do a lot of damage quickly.

Rotate People

One organization I have read about has people work in pairs, and they rotate the pairs often to keep people from becoming overly associated with a specific other person. I think the practice is smart, but you would need to experiment with the group size and rotation pattern to ensure it is working as expected. One caveat is to ensure people

have the skill set for the work they currently are asked to do. There also could be a downside, as some people would be forced to work with some others who they dislike or who have annoying habits.

These are just a few of the methods you can try to keep things fresh and lively at work. The most important aspect is to always move toward higher trust within the group.

Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD, is a consultant, trainer, speaker, and author in the areas of leadership and trust. He is the author of: The Trust Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals, Understanding E-Body Language: Building Trust Online, Leading with Trust is Like Sailing Downwind, and Trust in Transition: Navigating Organizational Change. Bob has many years as a senior executive with a Fortune 500 Company and with non-profit organizations.

