

Perspective Pays

by

Dianna Booher

Have you known people who had the answers before you asked the questions? That is, they see only one side to a conflict, one answer to the test, one best way to survey the group, only one way to market the product. To capsule the problem in a phrase, they lack perspective.

Perspective on specific social issues comes from political spin doctors. But perspective as a way of life comes from a communication style that values input before output. Listening before speaking.

Recently, we called a technician to take a look at an air-conditioner at home. When I came in from work that evening, I saw his mess. Rusty-looking splatters of water covered the kitchen cabinets, appliances, and floor. Obviously he hadn't cleaned up after himself. I was perturbed as I scrubbed up the rusty mess. But when he returned the next day to finish the repair job on the air-conditioner, he explained. "Sorry I left such a mess yesterday. Just as I was 'bout to leave I noticed that you had a leak from some busted plumbing. The spillovers in the attic were just about to overflow and come down through your kitchen ceiling. So, I rummaged around and found a bucket and tried to empty as much water off as I could. Saved your ceiling at least." My anger melted with the new perspective.

At a Boulder, Colorado church one of the women had one of the most irritable dispositions I've ever encountered. In addition to having a long face and sad eyes, she

complained about the kids “making noise” in the nursery, about the money “wasted on the teenagers’ programs,” about the time spent on marital counseling that could be “better spent on the needy.” Then one day she casually alluded to a past tragedy in her life. Her mother died in childbirth—giving birth to her. As a result, she had projected onto other parents and children all of her bitterness about not having a mother.

Her complaining became understandable to me.

That’s not to say that perspective will lead you to agreeing with someone else’s attitude, behavior, or action to resolve a problem. But perspective can give you just the information you need to negotiate from a position of strength, to offer excellent customer service when you don’t like the customer, to dismiss an employee who has annoying habits, or to hire a prospective employee with a rather “colorful” past but an intriguing plan for the future.

Input before output. In problem solving or decision making, as well as in communicating. At all costs, avoid coming across as a one-directional communicator.

Several months ago, I was visiting a trade-show booth when a man walked up, stuck out his hand to the exhibitor in the booth, and began: “My name’s _____. I noticed we’re competitors here at the show. We’ve got a booth over that way. You probably remember that Ford RFP that came out about four months ago. Well, if you’re wondering about it, we’ve got it sewed up. I understand your people bid on it. That was really a formality, because one of the VPs there had already made contact with us and wanted us in. That was an easy sale for us. You know what I mean? Don’t you wish all

of them were that easy? It's going to be a BIG contract. Three hundred thousand before they're through. Well, nice to meet you. Just wanted to stop by and say hello."

All of this came out without his ever taking a breath and without the other exhibitor ever having an opportunity (or inclination) to respond. He was the classic hit-and-run communicator.

With input and understanding comes power to negotiate, motivate, and innovate. The next time you have a conflict with a partner, a supplier, an employee or team leader, consider asking for their perspective on the situation or issue before launching into your own viewpoint. It could even save you an embarrassing moment like I almost spent with the repairman.

#

668 words

© Dianna Booher, Booher Consultants, Inc.

Dianna Booher works with organizations to increase their productivity and effectiveness through better oral, written, interpersonal, and cross-functional communication. She is a keynote speaker and prolific author of more than 40 books, including her latest, The Voice of Authority: 10 Communication Strategies Every Leader Needs to Know and Communicate with Confidence®. Successful Meetings magazine has named her to its list of "21 Top Speakers for the 21st Century." Dianna's communication training firm, Booher Consultants, Inc., is based in the Dallas/Ft. Worth Metroplex and serves many Fortune 500 clients. www.booher.com 817-318-6000