

Conundrum: What They Know or How They Do it?

Fact is, you can pretty much tell how much someone knows by:

1. Asking good questions and actually listening to and dissecting the answers.
2. Querying people you trust to tell you about him or her.
3. Giving a validated test.
4. Deciding based on the consensus of the majority who judged.
5. Torture.

The problem in business is that:

1. There aren't too many really good interviewers who can unearth the skeletons.
2. There is commonly some bias or agenda lurking within the persons offering input.
3. People can freeze up or cheat on a test.
4. Deciding by committee takes too long; unless it's a jury, limit the group to a few.
5. Torture is illegal, at least in election years.

The BIGGER problem for business: Too few people place enough value on a person's thought process, humanity and interpersonal style.

Fact is, knowing a lot doesn't make someone particularly adept—just knowledgeable. This is great for analytical positions requiring specific intelligence or scientific professions in which education significantly trumps personality. If looking to hire a leader, manager, or even someone who must proactively share information with peers, hiring a knowledgeable person is part of the equation, but it is NOT ENOUGH.

Consider Administrative Assistants, Executive Assistants and Secretaries. These are perhaps the most important people in any organization because they absolutely **must** possess multiple technical **and** behavioral skills; they are expected to quickly and assertively demonstrate them for decision-makers, check-writers and influence-peddlers within the organization.

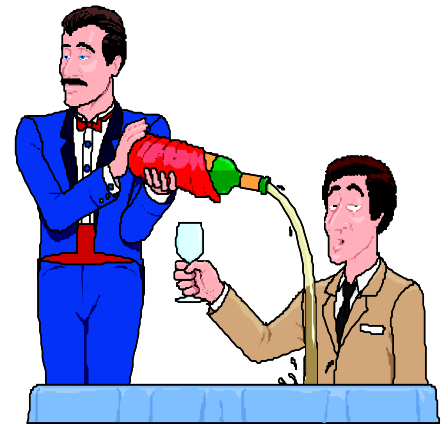
On the tech side, they need to know how to quickly navigate all of the company software that the boss has to use and in some instances, educate the boss on the finer points of how his phone, Blackberry, and even car work.

On the people side, their jobs entail knowing incredible secrets and deftly spotting—and thwarting—those with devious intentions. They are tasked with deflecting the machinations of others who make way more money and still do so with the utmost of diplomacy. They need to know how to insist in a manner that seems like there really is a choice. They must be stellar organizers, schedule jugglers and priority planners without conveying a sense of control, even though it is implicit because of their job. They have MAJOR influence over who receives a call back, a holiday card or an invitation to a bid on a job. Some are called upon to mother; some to manage the boss's many personal AND business conflicts and a few are granted an authority level akin to Nurse Ratched (thankfully, there aren't too many of these dinosaurs left).

The point is that an executive will spend an inordinate amount of time and energy seeking and cultivating a working-almost-familial relationship with a person who will serve him or her loyally and professionally; a person who s/he can always trust, whose skills are first-rate; who makes things happen without Mr./Ms. Big-shot having to be personally involved. This is great.

But back to the point—why would the pursuit of overall excellence be limited to the people who sit outside the door? Why do executives and managers interview all other direct reports—and maybe another level down—without due consideration of HOW the person will do the job? The simple answer is that it is difficult. The reality is that deep down, they know they won't be on the receiving end of that person's bad or unacceptable behavior. Fact is, about 95% of people will kiss up but not kiss down: the boss will always be indulged, catered to, accommodated and forgiven. Subordinates just don't get the same consideration.

This is where the costs mount. If good people are leaving the department or the company altogether, there is a serious and expensive problem and it can be laid on the doorstep of management. We have previously cited the cost of turnover to you but here it is again: **the average cost to replace a person is 1.5 times his or her annual salary.** We didn't make this up.



And that's just for starters. Once you factor in absenteeism and other results of poor management, you might as well take the annual bonus pool and flush it.

There are many ways to gauge a person's character and behavioral style. Spending time learning how to do so is an imperative strategy for retained earnings.

The first step is to identify the interpersonal characteristics that are most valuable to the company and convey them to the people already on board. Then live them. Reinforce them. Repeat reinforcement. Then get educated on how to interview for the real essence of a person. We can help.

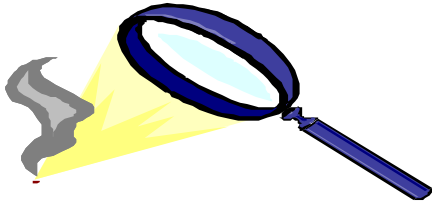
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Let's just say you have a huge decision to make. Whether to fire or keep someone; to spend the money on new equipment or software; if this or that date is best to launch a new policy, product, program, etc. You better know the difference between the facts and the reality before you shoot: (a) off your mouth (b) yourself in the foot (c) the messenger (d) in the dark (e) before you aim. The difference can determine success or failure.

A good example is how recalled Governor Gray Davis became the only ousted governor in the state of California and was only the second in the nation. While he inherited some of the state's dot.com-inspired fiscal problems (fact), his highly publicized fund-raising activities and the following energy crisis called into question his leadership ability (reality). His eye was not on the issues of the people, and so the people kicked him out.

Though it is an irrefutable fact that there is one

Monday and one Friday each week, the reality is that it only takes 2 days for a Monday to occur but it takes 4 to get to a Friday. This *reality* translates to the *fact* that people are generally happier and nicer on Fridays than on Mondays. See the difference? Reality is how people feel about something—how they position fact into their existence.

Back to the giant decision on your plate. Leaders, you cannot and must not act solely on your own knowledge and that of your trusted advisors (after all, your most trusted advisors often jump on your bandwagon because it is politically safer to do so). You are derelict if you do not consider the reality of the impact of your decisions on the people left to implement them; their preparedness, understanding, willingness to change; how it improves or worsens their lives. You do not have the luxury of deciding on a concept based on facts without finding out what the reality will be. To ensure a great outcome,

talk to the people who would be responsible for selling, performing, building, delivering, supporting and explaining what you propose to do. Your reputation depends on it.

This applies to workers, too. Especially those of you who interact with clients. Ask questions often. Present ideas for improvement regularly. Don't wait for the shoe to drop and then just grouse about it. This just makes you a malcontent and people don't like constant negativism.

We have (nicely) told our staffs the following over the years: "If you don't know what it's like out there, learn or we don't need you."

So when you make your next strategic or tactical move, don't rely solely on books, columns of numbers or Power Point presentations. Find out how it will play with the executing staff before it is too late or too expensive to save face or cover butt—yours.

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BIG DESK / LITTLE CUBE:

(a look at the varied perspectives of managers and employees)

When the Boss is Away...

A wonderful retired family member of ours works at a Hallmark store with a bunch of high school and college students. It is a long-established policy that one of the two people opening the store in the morning has to vacuum the entire store and the other is responsible for counting/verifying the money and preparing the registers.

When the store manager is one of the two working, both are always done. However, when the manager is not there, a few of these young employees tend to skim on the vacuuming (better than the money, but you get the point). This is infuriating, because it

shows their true colors: lazy and disrespectful. We just don't understand people who think the rules become mere suggestions when the boss is not there. To have integrity, as we have oft addressed, is to mean you can be relied upon to uphold the highest of standards without the boss being present.

Clearly, honor has not been adequately instilled in these workers. While sneaking a pass on a task one doesn't like to do can be great sport, the task is still left undone.

Yet others spend work time making personal calls or cruising the Internet because the boss is not there to see it. Some take extra time for breaks and lunches or come in late/leave early. Whatever makes a person think that the boss won't find out? That a co-worker won't say something?

Little Cube Dwellers/Employees:

Even if you have a lousy boss, there is no excuse for not doing your job thoroughly and with excellence in his or her absence.

Every time you cut corners or just don't do something, you are putting the onus on your peers to either lie for you or do it for you: neither of which makes them happy and most definitely signals to them that you don't care about the job OR them. If you want a job that allows you to slack off or be inaccurate, become a meteorologist and predict the weather.

BIG DESK OCCUPANTS:

If you never hear about what goes on in your absence, you might have a serious problem with your managerial style. Your employees should feel comfortable coming to you with legitimate concerns. They should feel that you will accept their reality of a situation without it backfiring on them for having told you, even if their beef is YOU. Sure, there are employees who will orbit around a nit and make mountains of molehills. It's your job to listen and ferret out both the facts AND the reality. Your solid performers have to be able to let you know what occurs when you are not there or you are risking losing them and ending up with the weaker ones who got away with sloughing off.

Once you have collected all salient information, you must act accordingly. Failure to act is akin to management malpractice, and if you don't want to end up looking for replacements, you need to rethink your style.

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Light Touches

Service Extras That Linger Long After the Experience

In a foray to a boutique called **Sunshine on 2nd** in Long Beach, CA, we bought some clothes for an impending vacation.

The ladies there—**Irma** in particular—were terrific. Instead of pushing merchandise, they struck up a conversation to learn a bit more about us—where we lived, whether we had visited their store before, etc. They in turn were genuinely interested and personable—sharing their own experiences; acting more like new friends than smarmy salespeople. They made helpful suggestions and really knew what they had that we might like.

We told them how delighted we were to discover their provision of some of our favorite brands and labels. We indulged ourselves with a few pieces and were then told about their rewards program. Like other retailers, they offer credit toward purchases upon reaching certain dollar thresholds.

In our case, we earned enough points to receive a \$50 rebate on our purchase that

day. Although the transaction had already been processed at the full amount, Irma offered to re-ring it for the lesser total. This impressed us. We thought that being offered a choice was extraordinary because most retailers angle for clients to return another time to generate more sales. We declined—we knew we'd be back because of the service and we're convinced they knew that. What a terrific practice—giving options!

A few days later we received the nicest handwritten notecard, which read,

"Thank you for your recent visit to our store. We are so glad that you discovered us and that you found so many cute new outfits. We really appreciate such kind and wonderful customers like you. Please come and see us again soon so that you can use your rewards cards! Thank you again. Sincerely, Irma at Sunshine on 2nd"

Wow.

pArticle Piques

Irksome iotas that cost:

...Like Putting Perfume on a Pig

Many grocery stores here in California have placed sanitary wipes near the shopping carts so that customers can clean their hands and the handles of the carts before shopping. We applaud this practice as it has repeatedly been proven that clean hands thwart the spread of disease. We don't know about you, but looking at some of the other shoppers can be incentive for a hazmat suit, so a little antibacterial cloth is more than welcome.

One local Ralph's store (part of the Kroger chain) does this as well. However, they have another practice that counteracts the benefits and inspired a letter from us.

When going through checkout, the shopper's cart is not used to load the groceries. Instead, the bagging person grabs a different empty cart. The shopper is left with her original, wiped-down basket without a place to put it and is relegated to one that quite possibly was pawed by a person whose fingers were recently in contact with something

fecal. While we aren't germophobes, we've heard way too many accounts of the teeming masses of bacteria found on equipment used by multiple parties to feel immune. Recent reports of highly resistant super germs (check out MRSA in the news—this is alarming) have furthered the need to take precautionary measures.

Anyway, we wrote to a few officials of Ralph's and asserted that their practice was counterintuitive. We suggested if it was employed to enhance efficiency that we didn't care to know the logic behind it, because it should not be done if resulting in consternation for customers.

We received a phone message from a woman representing the local District Manager. She said that since we weren't interested in learning the reasons for doing it, that she wouldn't tell us. While we found this rather amusing, it was unsatisfying. She then said that if we really wanted our original cart, to tell the courtesy clerk. She never acknowledged that their policy made no sense. So we are helping their efficiency by shopping elsewhere.



Bright Ideas

Reheating cold practices for more success

VOCABULARY CLEANUP

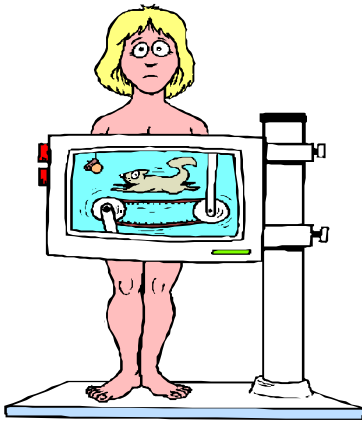
During a recent visit to Harvard University, we were astounded to listen to the banter of students as they ambled around the town square. The word "like" peppered almost every sentence with a frequency that outnumbered the ivy leaves. Phrases such as, "She like messed me up..." "I'm all like so..." "Like, Dude" (addressed to a girl, no less!) were spewed from the lips of this country's future leaders with a regularity that would make Metamucil turn green with envy.

In a place where the average tuition exceeds \$45,000 per year, we thought we'd rub elbows with a more eloquent bunch of young adults. Upon reflection, though, we realized we know and deal with people in high places whose verbiage could stand a good soaping up as well. Ending a sentence with a preposition is another particular irritant that occurs too frequently.

We don't bring this up to be literary snobs. We mention it because misuse or overuse of the language signals either indifference or ignorance. How people talk tends to sway how much they are respected. As an example, think of a certain leader here who will NOT pronounce "nuclear" properly and look at *his* popularity rating.

It's interesting to us that most people do not speak and write with the same words. This is probably because they really do know better and are aware what they write is harder to deny. It is doubtful that you will ever see a meeting request that reads "Be there at like 9:00 or if you like want to call in, let me know, like, where you are at."

We think the idea of imposing a 50-cent fine on the misuse of the word "like" is a grand idea. We'd get, like, *really* rich, Dude.



Buzzwords and Was-Words

It has been a while since we last circulated a list of the business terms du jour and yesterday, so thought we'd send an update of what's in and what's out.

Most of these words or phrases are bandied about by training types and speech givers who think they're impressing their audiences with new descriptors that cloak longtime practices. We, for two, try to avoid terminology that is just too cutesy or en vogue because it bugs us to act like lemmings.

Happy to See in the Rear View Mirror:

- ◇ **Paradigm/paradigm shift** (this confused more people than it appealed)
- ◇ **At the end of the day** (man, did this used to drive us nuts—all day long!)
- ◇ **Let's touch base** (Sounds like the beginning of sexual harassment!)
- ◇ **Bleeding edge technology** (Yuck—sounds like being held in front of a com-

Insider Insights
Thoughts and Information We Felt Like Sharing

- puter with a sharp object pointed at our throats)
- ◇ **One off** (okay, we're guilty, but we really hate this term. The word "off" is usually predicated by something distasteful)
- ◇ **Bandwidth, as in personal or personal capacity** (bandwidth is NOT human!)
- ◇ **Empowerment** (it was a good idea that leaders lauded but never implemented)
- ◇ **Mentoring** (see Empowerment)
- ◇ **Peter Principle** (there are just too many peters out there now to attribute one principle anymore)
- ◇ **Delta** (finance types used to try and confuse us with this word that means the difference or change in value or cost)
- ◇ **THINK!** (This one ought to be resurrected—soon!)

Still Irritating in Meetings and Publications:

- ◇ **On the same page** (does this make everyone a slow reader?)
- ◇ **Thought Leader** (this makes us gag)
- ◇ **Win Win** (successor to "winner", this could lead to the a bad habit of saying everything twice)
- ◇ **Values** (they are mentioned collectively but rarely individually—most employees can't name more than one of their company's values. Moreover they're not reinforced!)

Our Submission for a new Buzzword:

- ◇ PoCo (Politically Correct).
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Beacon Bits

Quotations to cast rays of humanity across everyday business life

There will always be another reality to make fiction of the truth we think we've arrived at. - Christopher Fry

If you think education is expensive, try ignorance. - Bumper Sticker

The recipe for perpetual ignorance is: Be satisfied with your opinions and content with your knowledge. - Elbert Hubbard

Words, like eyeglasses, blur everything that they do not make more clear. - Joseph Joubert

I want to thank everybody who made this day necessary. - Yogi Berra

**Last Laughs:
New Words**

The Washington Post's Style Invitational asked readers to take any word from the dictionary, alter it by adding, subtracting or changing one letter, and supply a new definition. Our thanks to Marty and Donna Friis for sending these to us:

- 1) **Bozone** (n): The substance surrounding stupid people that stops bright ideas from penetrating. The bozone layer, unfortunately, shows little sign of breaking in the near future.

- 2) **Cashtration** (n): The act of buying a house, which renders the subject financially impotent for an indefinite period.
- 3) **Sarchasm** (n): The gulf between the author of sarcastic wit and the person who doesn't get it.
- 4) **Osteopornosis** (n): A degenerate disease.
- 5) **Inoculatte** (v): To take coffee intravenously when you are running late.
- 6) **Hipatitis** (n): Terminal coolness.
- 7) **Glibido** (v): All talk and no action.
- 8) **Karmageddon** (n): It's like, when everybody is sending off all these really bad vibes, right? And then, like, the Earth explodes and it's like, a serious bummer.

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We wish the happiest of holidays to all of our friends and associates. Thank you for your continued support!

Leslie and Denise