

Hello, everybody. Dennis Engelbrecht with Digging Deeper. Today, I want to talk about soliciting feedback, getting feedback, and as a leader, I guess, in general, I'd just say two heads are better than one. We've heard that phrase many times. And to get the best thoughts, the best ideas, the best decisions, of course it's better to have more than one person involved in that to be able to get the other ideas and all of that.

So, one of the things I've witnessed over the last several months with some leaders is they're not very good really at inviting that feedback, receiving that feedback. And it sort of creates a cycle where they don't get much feedback. And then you end up with a situation where you only have one head instead of the two heads is better than one sort of truism. So how do you get better feedback from your teams, your employees, your fellow contractors, on a job? How do you get that feedback? How can you be more effective as a leader in being able to invite that feedback and get to the best decisions?

Well, thinking about this, I created a list of do's and don'ts, if you will. So, if you want to get good input, the first thing you have to do is really create the opportunity for that input. If you come into a job meeting, for example, and you do all the talking start to finish, and you've thought about it beforehand, and you've come up with your plan, and this is the plan, well, you're not really creating an opportunity for input. But if you come into a meeting, or even before that meeting, you invite others to give you that input, or you do at the beginning of the meeting, and then put together the plan, obviously that's creating a situation for input versus not creating one.

The second thing is to remember to listen more than you speak. I was on a conference call a couple of weeks ago. And when I got off of the call, it really struck me that it was kind of a monologue. And as a monologue, it really didn't provide the value that that meeting usually can require. And what I found again, was that the leader was doing all the speaking and wasn't really listening or inviting that feedback.

The next thing is, if you're in a meeting, look around, look at the body language. Sometimes the feedback that you need or the information you need isn't volunteered, but you can sort of tell by looking at folks that they have an idea, and maybe they're uncomfortable with their idea, or they're uncomfortable speaking up. So, you have to actually solicit that feedback. You have to ask people, "John, what do you think about this idea?" "Wayne, what's your view on that?" Or, "Sari, you look uncomfortable. Is there something about this that you like or don't like that we need to hear from?" So, as a leader, you've got to be aware of everybody in the room and at times, solicit that feedback to pull it out and bring it out.

Next thing, sort of taking that another step, seek out disagreement. It's very easy to get a group think thing going, where because the leader says something, everybody sort of gets on board and says, "Yeah, that's the right way to do it." But is it the right way to do it? Is there a better way to do it? So, by seeking out disagreement, by asking, "Do you see any flaws in this plan in the way we're looking at it?" "Will this work?" Ask the questions and seek out that disagreement.

And the next thing. This happens a lot of times, and it's sort of a power thing, sometimes comes from ego. But folks will be trying to come up with a decision, they'll hold the important data or knowledge that's necessary to get to the right decision. And by not sharing that, they really don't give other people the opportunity to truly contribute in that decision-making. So, if you want to get to the best decision, make sure you're providing the data and knowledge to everybody you're inviting into that sphere to make that decision, so that people can contribute with the full background and the full ideas around that. And that'll help you get to better decisions.

The next thing. I have this in both the do's and the don'ts. So, the do here is avoid passive aggressive behavior. And by passive aggressive behavior, I mean, well, somebody comes up with an idea and you don't like it, and you say, "Well, if that's the way you want to do it, then you do it." You know, that type of thing. Instead of going through and trying to fight for which is the best path to do it, to sort of pass off your responsibility if somebody wants to do it another way.

So, the don'ts to keep in mind in this two heads better than one objective; don't interrupt. When the other folks are giving an idea, explaining themselves, try not to interrupt. Try to just listen, take it all in, and then at the end, if you have some questions, of course, ask them. If you think they're on the wrong track, maybe ask some questions to help frame that and help them discover themselves they may be on the right track. But try not to interrupt them.

Try not to be judgmental. Almost any time there's a decision to be made or a route to be taken, you've got an idea of what you think the best thing is. Well, if you come into a meeting, especially as a leader, and you already have that idea, sometimes it's hard not to be judgmental. Somebody has a different idea, well, that doesn't fit with where I'm thinking. So you can be judgemental, and that judgemental attitude can come across in your body language or in how you react to them or the things that you say. So be careful not to be judgemental. Try to be open-minded. I mean, if you're not going to be open-minded, why invite people's participation anyway.

Next thing is be careful. And this kind of goes along with the judgemental thing. Be careful not to dismiss ideas out of hand. Even though John was way off base, let's just say, in this particular item, John still has an opinion, and he thought that through. And we want to show him the value of his thinking. And maybe hear more about it, or again, get some questions, discussion around his idea. If you dismiss people out of hand, what are your odds of getting a good idea from them the next time? They're going to be possibly fearful or hold back their ideas. And that doesn't lead you to getting to the best decisions.

The next thing is, getting the best idea is not a contest. If it's important that you win... A couple of people around the table have different ideas. I have an idea. Think about that in a sense. Do you feel like it's important that you win, that your idea carries the day? Or are you truly looking for the best idea? So again, that's something to avoid. Avoid that thing where you've got to win by having the idea that carries the day.

So, this two heads better than one thing, and the processes you use to hopefully get the best idea, the best decisions in each case, this has a huge impact on your overall culture. Just think about, in all of your team meetings, leadership processes, all of these things, when you're trying to come to that best decision, if you're putting off some of these vibes that you know best, and your decision counts, or your thoughts count more than the others do, that's going to have a negative effect on morale. It's going to have a negative effect on trust. It's going to inhibit communication, which is going to be important across the whole organization.

So again, try to heed these best lessons, watch your do's and don'ts, and definitely two heads are better than one. Thanks for tuning in.