How can you assist your leader to become more effective with their team and in their meetings?

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One of the most frequently asked questions I get asked in my Leadership Practices for Challenging Times program is, "How can I influence a leader/facilitator who is off track when I am just a member of the team?"

The first question to answer is an internal one – are you trying to help this person or are you primarily trying to change this person's behavior for your needs? Most of the time the answer is a bit of both. Ideally your interest is in helping this person and the outcomes for the team outweigh your personal outcomes.

Getting Yourself Ready to Provide Feedback and Support

Once you have decided that you want to be of assistance to the facilitative leader, the first step is getting yourself ready to provide feedback and support. Many of us worry about the negative ramifications of what might happen if we were to approach another for this purpose. It may involve a bit of a risk, but it needs to be counterbalanced by two factors:

1. Your own sense of personal responsibility – to be a cause rather than effect.
2. The ability to center yourself in empathy and compassion for the leader.

I tend to be a judgmental person and I work at setting my initial reactions aside. I have two ways of doing this. The first is to ask myself what I would rather focus on – frustration, what's wrong, what's missing or empathy, caring, compassion and love. The answer is always easy.

"No act of love is ever wasted."
– Richard Morgan

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Building Receptivity to Feedback and Support

The approach is relatively simple with one proviso – the leader needs to be willing to accept some feedback and assistance. Most of you might immediately feel disheartened by this statement, however my experience is that almost everyone is open for feedback and assistance under the right conditions. Please remember that the leader that falls into this scenario is not generally one who solicits feedback or creates opportunities for feedback in the normal meeting or operational structures – this is why you are exploring alternative ways of approaching such a person.

The bottom line is that you need to know certain things about the leader/facilitator that will increase the probability of their openness to your feedback and support. You will likely have to spend time to understand their:

- Outcomes
- Approach strategy
- Values

I have listed these in the order of ease of gaining such insights. In terms of outcomes, you can simply ask about their outcomes in a given situation. Better yet, you can ask to see if you understand their outcomes and allow them to agree or correct you. Remember Steven Covey:

"Seek first to understand before being understood."

APPROACH STRATEGY

Approach strategy is another way of describing the conditions in which this person may be receptive to feedback and support. This would be based on your past experience and observations. For some, they are always open to feedback. For others, they want it privately and where they have the time to contemplate the feedback. For others it might be after a really positive event or successful day. If you are observant and have some history with this person, this shouldn't be too difficult. You can ask yourself, "What have been all the times where this person was receptive to assistance and feedback?" If you haven't had this history with the leader you should be able to identify people who have such a history and pull out the experiences from them. From this review it should be relatively simple to pull out the best approach strategy for this person.

HIGHLY HELD VALUES

The third thing you need to know or understand about the leader is their Highly Held Values. For some this is easy – they continually tell us directly about their values. For others their values are under the surface and it may take a bit more sleuth work. I have found that the "Columbo approach" is effective. You may remember Lt. Columbo from the famous TV program of the 70's. He was this lovable, seemingly blundering guy who always got to the core issues through his persistent observation and questioning skills. Questioning another person about their values takes care and rapport. This means that you need to have a positive relationship with the other person as a prerequisite. I have provided you with a few links to learn a little more about rapport and permission.

When you have the relationship and rapport, you have the "permission" to ask another person a series of simple sequential questions that will surface their values and beliefs. These questions are derived from the Ladder of Inference (Ladder of Inference video) developed by Donald Schon and Chris Argyris.

- ❏ **What conclusions or assumptions underlie your approach with our team?**
- ❏ **What past evidence about the situation and our team dynamics have led you to these assumptions and conclusions?**
- ❏ **Given this past history, what is really important to you that underlie your approach – what values are most important to you in this current situation with our team?**

5 Tips for Giving Feedback and Support

Now that I have laid out the foundation, let's get to some specific recommendations about approach:

1. The first tip is to approach the leader/facilitator on the "side" - that is between meetings or at a break in the meeting.
2. Speak your truth about what is going in the meeting

for you – don't speak for the group, speak for yourself. Remember:

"Truth not spoken in love is not truth."
– Sri Gary Olsen.

Give the person your evidence of what is happening in the meeting without your interpretations or judgments.

For Example: "For me, I feel like I would like to give more input into our topics than time seems to allow. My evidence of this conclusion is that we stay strictly to a timed agenda. If we run out of time based on the agenda you seem to call time and say that we need to move on."

3. Suggest solutions and alternatives rather than focusing on what isn't working.

For Example: "For me what would work, is to open up the possibility to spend more time on an issue even if we reach the end of the time allotted on the agenda. You would ask the group if the issue is important enough to extend the time in order to better achieve our overall outcomes."

4. Use your most approachable voice tone when giving the feedback. Approachable voice speaks to valuing the relationship rather than being authoritative (Credible Voice Pattern). The master at teaching and modeling credible and approachable voice patterns is Michael Grinder. A short description from Michael of approachable voice pattern is:

It consists of the following elements:

- a wider range of modulation than the credible voice with a rise in tone a the end of phrases
- eye contact
- a slight head bounce
- a slight leaning forward

This voice reduces any sense of threat, making it psychologically safe for group members to contribute ideas, questions, and concerns.

Approachable Voice is used for:

- developing a positive relationship with the group
- creating psychological safety within the group through its use during paraphrasing, and inquiring to stimulate responses by group members

5. Frame your suggestions within the values of the leader. Again the feedback and offer of assistance is for the other person, not for you. First understand their values and then connect your feedback to how they can better achieve their values and outcomes through a modified approach. Remember, the best way to get another person to be open to your thoughts is to frame your suggestions around what is important to them. Your input should help them accomplish their outcomes.

4 Simple Ways a Leader Can Validate Your Observations

It is quite possible that your observations and interpretations may not be accurate or representative for the group. It is useful to acknowledge this to the leader and to offer them ways in which they can validate your input with the team. Here are a few simple process suggestions:

1. The leader can do a group check-in at any point in a conversation or dialogue. This can be as simple as taking 5-10 minutes and asking the group two questions:

- How is the conversation process going for each of you?
- What changes could we consider that would improve the process and our outcomes?

2. A second option would be to conduct a brief written survey. This provides more anonymity, but the feedback is limited by the quality of the questions in the survey.

3. The leader can do a Crumple and Toss Process which is a variation between the above two options. It provides safety and can open up dialogue in real time in the team (see Crumple and Toss video).

4. Conduct a brief check-in on group agreements. This process check presupposes that the team has a pre-existing set of group or team agreements. This is a very healthy way for a team to continually reflect on and adjust their agreements in the interest of continually learning and refining what they do as a team. One of the best processes for developing team agreements and operating principles is the Totems, Taboos and Repetitive Interactions Process developed by Richard Knowles and Tim Dalmau (see Totems, Taboos and Repetitive Interactions Process).

For much more information regarding process choices and selection, I refer you back to my website or to my published resources. Please email to let me let if this has been useful information to you at: steve@stevezuieback.com. **HAVE A GOOD TIME ON YOUR JOURNEY!**