

LEADERSHIP BRIEFINGS

Taking your leadership skills to the next level

VOLUME 34 • MAY 2019

Leadership Tips

The quickest way to shut down an employee who offers an idea is to say, "We tried that already." With that, you may never hear a suggestion from him again. Instead, say, "We tried something similar, but go ahead, perhaps we missed something." Two things can come of that response: (1) Maybe he does have a new angle and (2) you'll have an employee whose thoughts are heard out, and thus is likely to contribute to discussions.

Forget someone's name? Never guess. You'll likely get it wrong and the person would much rather hear your honesty than to be called by someone else's name. In fact, take the blame for your absentmindedness: "I'm sorry. Can you tell me your name again? I've just gone completely blank."

"Do you have any questions?" How often have you asked this in front of a group and were met with silence? Changing the wording to "What questions do you have?" might get some queries tossed your way. Why? Because "Do you have any questions?" is really asking if questions exist in anyone's mind, and the answer could be "no." On the other hand, "What questions do you have?" insinuates that questions do exist and you'd like to hear them. ■

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Rant at your peril—it never works

In March, the CEO of National Beverage Corporation released a statement to respond to the results of a quarterly report on one of its most popular products, LaCroix seltzer water. This statement has already become legendary for its bizarre, insensitive language (*Slate* labelled it "deranged") and the declaration that a profit loss was due to "injustice."

In the same month, the creator of a popular true crime podcast announced that the show was over after its distributing network severed ties. During the announcement, which most certainly qualified as a rant, he called out individuals whom he insisted had campaigned to take him down, destroy his life and boycott anyone who associated with him. Assuming no responsibility for his history of hostile

and aggressive online behavior, he declared himself a victim of the current culture war in America.

Do rants ever really work? By their very nature they're unplanned and instinctual; any solid advice of pre-announcement cool-down or discussion of a more productive and reasonable attack are likely lost as the dam gives way. In a rant, emotional intelligence is not on the plate.

And they never go how you'd like. Nobody ever ends a rant on a perfect note of cutting wit. The rant always ends up backfiring, betraying the weaknesses of the ranter. In 2017, a public perception survey by Stanford Business School clearly showed an intolerance for misbehaving CEOs. It found that while the public is

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Leadership Psychology

Remember to heed the _____ Effect!

Business practices and the study of the mind have always gone hand-in-hand. Psychological effects are often applied to human nature in professional environments. Here are some interesting ones you may not have heard of:

Worse-Than-Average Effect. The tendency to underestimate our own achievements and attributes when stacked against those of others.

Mozart Effect. Listening to Mozart's music specifically may increase productivity of certain cognitive processes of spatial reasoning involved in sculpture, architecture, carpentry and, of course, music.

Hawthorne Effect. The manner in which employees modify their behavior if under the impression they're being watched, studied, or more attended to than usual.

Rhyme-as-Reason Effect. A perception or bias that a rhyming aphorism is more truthful than one that doesn't rhyme.

Pratfall Effect. The way someone's appeal can actually increase after a mistake, provided they're generally competent.

Focusing Effect. Initially fixating on one part of an event and being blind to other important or influencing factors.

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About to criticize? First, ask...

1. “Were my expectations clear?” Most employees will do the right things—if they know what those are. Telling them to be friendly to customers is vague. “Smile when you greet a new customer and introduce yourself” is far superior.

2. “Why should this person listen to me?” The fact that you are the boss isn’t enough. For employees to take feedback to heart they must trust you. Have you praised great performance in the past? Does the employee know about your expertise in this particular area?

3. “Is this something the person can change?” If you’ve put a shy person in a position that requires an outgoing personality, for example, you’ve made a hiring mistake. You would be better off moving the employee to a different position than trying to coach a wallflower into being gregarious.

4. “How can the employee monitor his or her own behavior?” Train employees to be aware of their performance and use their own observations to improve how they act. ■
— Adapted from “Need to Deliver Some Negative Feedback? 5 Things to Keep in Mind,” David Witt, Blanchard Leader Chat, <http://leaderchat.org>.

Effects

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Mere-Exposure Effect. Repetition alone makes a message more believable.

Spacing Effect. Learning is more successful when done in spaced-out intervals instead of during a single intensive session.

Ringelmann Effect. The more members in a group, the less productive each individual will become.

Pygmalion Effect. A leader’s high expectations will result in a higher level of performance in followers. (The converse is called the Golem Effect.)

Tamagotchi Effect. Humans can develop emotional attachment to technological objects such as computers, robots or machines.

Google Effect. A lack of retention for information that can be easily found online. Also called digital amnesia. ■

Negotiation Skills

Dealmaking *is* emotional, and it’s OK

Daniel Shapiro, founder and director of the Harvard International Negotiation Program, reminds us that trying to become a “hyper-rational robot” during stressful negotiations isn’t a realistic strategy. Instead of trying to smother emotions, you should address the opposing side’s five core concerns as the dealmaking process begins.

1. Appreciation. It’s vital to state an understanding, and even empathy for, the opposing viewpoint. Shapiro speaks of marriage studies that could predict with 90% accuracy which couples remained together and which eventually broke apart. The studies were based on a simple observation of what happened when a man and wife were asked to discuss a recent conflict between them for 15 minutes. The predictable tensions that ensued revealed to researchers that couples who voiced five appreciative comments for every negative or combative one were the ones far more likely to remain strong. The negative barbs weren’t the concern; the far more damaging thing was the failure to meet that 5:1 ratio.

2. Autonomy. Even a completely agreeable course of action will meet with high emotions and resistance if you coerce someone into it. “You can spend weeks or months putting together the perfect contract proposal that meets your and the opposing sides’ interests better than you ever dreamed of,” Shapiro says, “but if you walk into that room, put it down on the table, and say ‘Take it or leave it ...’”

3. Affiliation. Suppose you feel you’re being excluded in a meeting, whether you sense it’s because of your lack of

experience, your title or even your gender. The same part of your brain that feels physical pain feels rejection too; the sense of disconnect can be just as powerful as a punch to the stomach. Your affiliation with the people in the room, and the content of what they’re saying, is gone.

4. Status. Imagine two people in an office with two chairs, one of which is broken and far too low to the ground. Not a good situation for working out a disagreement. Even without such a disparity, we naturally bring in our own desire to feel on higher ground than the adversary.

But “as we compete over status, we lose the benefit of affiliation,” Shapiro says, so create level ground by emphasizing areas of particular status in both yourself and the other party. Acknowledge that your expertise or experience might not equal theirs, for example, or be completely frank about what you have to lose— but then assert that you’re also bringing something invaluable to the table.

5. Role. Entering a negotiation, we tend to play pre-established roles that we’re used to, or that are expected of us. Examples of these roles are: Talker, Colleague, Advocate, Compromiser, Advisor, Victim. You have the power to shake things up, though, by saying, “Let me be the devil’s advocate here,” or “Try approaching this for now as if we’re collaborators on a paper,” or “Let’s be nothing but brainstormers for the next half hour.” Invite someone into a role they weren’t quite expecting and viewpoints are expanded, imaginations are stirred, understanding is achieved. ■

Rants

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most intolerant of “lying or making misleading statements about their company’s product,” the second most intolerable concerns business leaders who engage in behavior that is morally questionable. High levels of accountability are desired,

even demanded. A public rant consistently seems to reinforce our shopworn and surely limited impression of business leaders as unkind, overpaid, entitled, paranoid, out-of-touch tyrants.

Rants are not new, but they’re now made so rapidly and widely available that anyone, globally, can experience them, in all their furious, flailing glory. ■

A reporter just called. Ready?



Why do you need to prepare for a media interview?

We all know the saying ... practice makes perfect. We also know the saying failing to prepare is preparing to fail. It's true! You need to prepare for an interview!

If you're not prepared, you may get nervous and accidentally provide the wrong information or come off as flustered. That creates a bad reflection on you and your organization. Your responses should flow easily. This will help you feel confident and in control. This will help you or your organization become a credible source for future interviews. OK, let's get started. ...

Preparation tips

Before you gather your content for an interview you need to know the topic, as well as the PURPOSE of the interview. You also need to know the media outlet and their audience.

Understanding WHO will interview you and a bit about their prior stories, articles or work is also essential.

Then you need your content. This includes 3-5 bullet points worth of information about the interview subject matter. This may also include a quick introduction about you/your organization and your mission or purpose.

For many interviews, you can request questions ahead of time or you can provide suggested questions to be proactive. If you hire a public relations expert, this is their job: to help you and decrease your workload and a bit of your anxiety about the interview.

Relationship-building tip

It's important to break the ice with the person who will interview you so you both feel comfortable with each other.

A solid handshake and eye contact is important. Perhaps offer a simple compliment of a prior piece of their work.

Don't forget! This is public relations. It's all about building relationships and human connections.

If your interview is by phone, smile! Your authenticity, positive energy and genuine knowledge of the topic will come through.

What not to say in an interview

- Never lie to the media. Remember that credibility is everything for you, your brand, your organization and your reputation.
- Do not use industry jargon when speaking to the media. Instead, use simple words to convey your idea.
- If you do not want the public to know about it, do not say it.
- Do not discuss your organization's financial information.
- Do not discuss a competitor.
- If you have nothing else to say in an interview, do not babble.
- Pauses are important. Listening is an important tool. Use it.

What's OK to say in an interview

- Information that has been approved by your organization. For example, a press release, fact sheet, bio/CV/ résumé, or statistics on relevant topics within your market/niche are all great documents to prepare ahead of any interviews or a campaign.
- If you do not know an answer to a question, it's OK. Offer to get the answer as soon as possible.
- Always say thank you. A handwritten or email thank you is very important in building relationships. Send a note the same day as the interview, and again when the segment airs or the article or placement hits the public domain.

Final tips for a media interview

- Stay positive.
- Be kind. Be genuine. #BEYOU ■

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Should you write a book?

Thinking about writing your first book? As a successful business leader, you certainly have ideas and experiences to share. Here are some things to consider as you start your journey.

Find your topic. This process will be personal, obviously, but consider your strengths and what ideas will attract an audience. Have a clear mission for what you want to achieve and what the tone of the book will be.

Choose a great title. It's not absolutely necessary to have your title when you start writing and compiling your ideas; the perfect title can sometimes reveal itself along the way.

Create an outline. This is useful as an early exercise to see if you have enough content to fill a book-length manuscript. Lay out your possible chapters, and write a paragraph about what you'll cover and how. If your content falls short, consider going another route, like an e-book, which can be shorter.

Decide how you'd like to publish. Traditional publishing is not the only way to reach an audience. Though there's certainly clout in having a reputable publishing house work with you, it also involves a book proposal process, getting an agent on the strength of that proposal, a lot of wait time and minimal revenues. Self-publishing is a more immediate process, and you make your own rules. You owe it to yourself to see what's possible and what's really important to you as an author. And remember that the thirst for audiobooks has never been higher.

Make good editing paramount to your book. It's crucial to your product and, frankly, your reputation as an authority.

Be creative with your resources. Reach out to your LinkedIn connections. Interview colleagues and other leaders. Look in the acknowledgments section of some of your favorite leadership books to see if the author thanked their agent (they often do), and start a list of contacts to approach. Look around you. Ask questions. Share your wisdom. And don't forget to have fun. ■

By the way... pay your taxes!

It's that time again... for tax-day pizza specials! In case you need more motivation, here's a list of famous tax evaders to serve as cautionary tales.

Al Capone. The violent gangster was finally indicted on tax evasion, because no other charge thrown at him would stick. In this case, well, whatever works.

Martha Stewart. Martha thought she shouldn't have to pay taxes on her Hamptons property because she "didn't spend much time there."

Abbott & Costello. The legendary comedy duo were nabbed by the IRS in 1956 and forced to sell off their possessions, including, sadly, their film rights.

Studio 54. The famously bacchanalian nightclub shuttered when its owners were caught cooking the books. It was only open for 33 months.

Leona Helmsley. This indictment from the 80s gave us a great *let them eat cake*-esque quote from the powerful hotelier: "We don't pay taxes. Only the little people pay taxes." ■

Is this you?

I'll be happy when I get a new job ... I'll be happy when I get married ... I'll be happy when I make my first million ...

Sound familiar? "This is 'I'll Be Happy When' Syndrome, and nearly everyone suffers from it because our blueprint for success is based on the world we used to live in, not the world we have today," says psychologist & Fortune 500 executive leadership consultant, Dr. Natalia Peart.

"To cure it, we must start seeing success as a lifestyle, not a destination, so that you can finally be happy now wherever you are in life," she explains.

We *think* happiness comes only after we've checked off the things on our list in order to get to happy. We need to create a lifestyle in the here and now that includes both our bigger goals and our right-now goals for things that bring us joy, happiness and well-being. ■

The Leader's Toolbox

On the music/leadership connection

Consider these terms: *resonance, harmony, rhythm, symphony, ensemble, dynamics, pitch, scale*. As a leader, do any of these words strike a chord?

Leadership theorists will tell you that music is a great metaphor for understanding your own style, and that learning music at any level is also a great way to strengthen leadership skills.

Some common denominators between musicians and leaders are:

The whole brain. The left side of the brain has to do with logic, the right with creativity and artistic endeavors. Could you conduct an orchestra or a corporation without mastery of both?

Self-discipline. Working musicians and business leaders know the impor-

ance of focus, keeping a sustainable schedule, and maintaining health to perform at their best.

Improvisation. Informed risks and anticipatory action are crucial in both arts.

Emotional intelligence. Interpersonal sensitivity, judgement, and empathy are necessary to communicate your vision, to collaborate and to accept feedback.

Ability to influence. Music reaches all cultures in all areas of the world. Leaders have the potential to inspire and unify people toward collective goals.

Composer, conductor, author, and teacher Leonard Bernstein once said: "To achieve great things, two things are needed: a plan, and not quite enough time." Now, surely *that* strikes a chord. ■

Communication Skills

How to deliver bad news

In the late 60s, Dr. Rob Buckman studied medicine and biochemistry at Cambridge University. He was also a comedian, and performed at a club at night. After he completed his medical training, he established himself in the British comedy world.

Then he himself got sick.

As a performer and satirist, he noticed a certain absurdity and disrespect in the way that doctors' own squeamishness about the subject of bad news was a problem. In 1978, he even co-created and wrote an entire TV program, "The Pink Medicine Show," to present medical sketches. He became an oncologist, and his commitment to improving communication of doctors continued.

His steps breaking down the process engendered the now globally implemented SPIKES protocol, an acronym for Setting, Perception, Invitation, Knowledge, Empathy, Strategy and Summary.

Though you may not be a leader in a medical field, there are most assuredly lessons there for all leaders. It's a necessary part of the job, and many cite it as the hardest part.

Take responsibility. Blaming others for the position you're in is one of the largest missteps a leader can take. It signals a lack of courage and engenders mistrust.

Avoid vagueness. Though this may be a challenging way to think about it, your recipient deserves a straightforward approach.

Be accurate. Prepare yourself with the information needed, and don't try to freestyle it. Don't flail.

Listen. Let people react and say what they think. In the aftermath of the news, you may be naturally wanting to comfort someone. Hold back, and don't offer your advice unless you're asked for it.

Share your plan. Describe the actions you'll take and your intention of how you'll turn things around.

Deliver. Keep your promises. Show that your team can count on you to guide them through challenges, to help them learn, and to see change and transition for the gifts that they are. ■

Fordlandia: A parable of arrogance

In the late 1920s, the Ford Motor Company bought millions of acres of land in Brazil. Henry Ford's intention was to start a rubber plant there, and to utilize that product in the manufacturing of its cars.

But his vision was bigger than that. He wanted to build an industrial utopia of sorts. He even gave it a name: Fordlandia.

And so, in the jungles of Brazil, he ordered the creation of a small, Midwestern American town.

Ford had grown up on a farm, and he wanted to provide that same bucolic, folksy scene. The village would have a power plant, a sawmill, a church, and a hospital. The medical care, as well as the education, would be free. He was also determined to pay the Brazilian workers good wages, to install time clocks and limit the workday to eight-hour shifts.

He never actually visited this utopia but tried to commandeer operations from his home in Michigan. Despite the good intentions, insurmountable cultural disconnects emerged. Ford attempted to impose self-reflecting controls over every aspect of this manufactured com-

munity, even down to the entertainment, food and drink.

He loved square dancing, so he had a large dance hall built in Fordlandia, which didn't get much use by the residents. He also didn't drink, so he prohibited alcohol. Last, but most certainly not least, he was a vegetarian. Ford insinuating his food preferences on his workers finally tipped the scales. This last issue actually led to riots in 1930, which destroyed much of the town.

Ford also mistrusted what he saw as fancy, overeducated experts like botanists and agronomists. So he remained bull-headedly unaware of the fungi and insects in that area of the Amazon that ultimately triumphed, taking the rubber trees after countless replantings.

"It's a parable of arrogance, but the arrogance isn't that Ford thought he could tame and conquer the Amazon," says historian Greg Grandin. "He thought he could tame and conquer capitalism, industrial capitalism. That didn't happen." ■

— Adapted from "Fordlandia," 99% Invisible episode #298, Radiotopia podcast network.

Give them money or awards?

When evaluating possible award systems for your team, consider these factors.

Awards are social. Since they're usually handed out around peers, they can make the recipient feel appreciated by people whose opinions they value.

Awards provide prestige. Awards can be a meaningful way to thank someone for whom monetary awards hold little interest.

Organizations can benefit from them as well as individuals. If you're a smaller or more cash-strapped company, awarding team members for their engagement can be a powerful way to increase motivation.

Awards can create a connection and a bond of loyalty between the giver and the recipient, particularly in environments where it's hard to put a monetary value on things.

On the other hand. ...

Awards can backfire in interesting ways. They can lead to increased effort in nonrecipients and reduced focus in those awarded. The sense of having something to strive for is a potent motivator.

They lose their meaning if given for just a normal part of one's work. They should be used as special honors, to indicate that someone has gone above and beyond.

It feeds the innate dissatisfaction in people. It can be distressingly easy to find sources of resentment when you perceive that some people around you are doing better.

Awards can be mishandled by the givers. Prizes or awards can be used to manipulate potential recipients, to reward friends or cement loyalties.

Awards can be over-distributed. Since they don't cost money, they have the potential to be given too often, or to too many recipients. They can also be habitually distributed to the established superstars, which can discourage those with new ideas and hamper growth. ■

— Adapted from "Better Than Cash: How Awards Can Shape Our Behavior," National Public Radio, *Hidden Brain*, February 25, 2019.

Social Media

The new rules of social media

While social media giants Facebook and Twitter have had their fair share of trouble in the past year or so—with outages, an influx of bots, foreign adversaries using the platforms for nefarious reasons and more—both are still dominant ways to promote your brand by sharing content.

Things have gotten just a bit trickier, so follow these rules to ensure your content is seen and shared:

The content must be great. If you are sharing boring or weak content, people won't read it. For everything you post, make sure it is something that people will want to share with others.

Stick to content that will last. The occasional timely post that helps you capitalize on a trend or hashtag is smart. However, if

you are in business, you want to share insights that will be relevant in your industry—and shared or retweeted—for weeks.

Increase the frequency of your posts. Wordstream found that on Twitter, engagement increased 46% after publishing 30 more tweets than the week prior, and the 30 extra tweets helped push 30% more traffic to the website with 60% more link clicks than the previous week.

Find trending topics to post about. Social media management tools, like Mention, send you alerts when a keyword you select is online. That provides you with an opportunity to comment on topics relevant to your industry. ■

— Adapted from "7 Social Media Management Tips to Save Time & Improve Results," Mary Lister, www.wordstream.com.

6 ways to draw in readers

Whether it's the subject line of your email or title of a report, those first few words are critical. These tactics convince people to keep reading:

1. **Include a number.** A headline with a number can draw up to eight times more readers to a blog post. When readers are short on time, a small number can convince them that a piece won't take too long to read.
2. **Speak to the audience.** Use something generic, like "employees."
3. **Strengthen your words.** Choose specific, strong words.
4. **Pique curiosity.** Say just enough to whet the appetite.
5. **Tap emotions.** Mention what your readers want, fear or are frustrated by.
6. **Create urgency.** Use words like "now" and "today." ■

— Adapted from "9 Tips for Writing Magnetic Headlines Right Away," Lindsey McCaffrey, Ragan's PR Daily, www.prdaily.com.

www.leadershipbriefings.com
Business Management Daily

LEADERSHIP BRIEFINGS

Taking your leadership skills to the next level

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Volume 34, Number 5

Leadership Briefings (ISSN 1042-0657) is published monthly by Business Management Daily, 7600A Leesburg Pike, West Building, Suite 300, Falls Church, VA 22043-2004. (800) 543-2055. www.leadershipbriefings.com. Annual subscription price: \$299.

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Time Management

Work better by 'managing delay'

Frank Partnoy is a professor of law and finance and the author of a book called *Wait: The Art and Science of Delay*. In a chapter dedicated to procrastination, he says that procrastination, or "managing delay," is actually an important element in life and business. It's delaying gratification. People and businesses make better decisions when they're able to delay gratification.



And yet, other theorists define procrastination as the triumph of instant urge gratification. So, is procrastination an impulsive or a regulating action? Possibly both. The good news is: procrastination does not necessarily mean weakness or laziness or slack morals or self-defeating behavior. It's a complex way of arranging discomfort that goes beyond simply trying to bully your brain into better time management. Habits require examination.

Some tips for avoiding the quicksand of procrastination and turning it around:

- **Ask: What's my best time?** All of us have times of the day when we're more productive. As much as you can, try to actively leverage those hours.

- **Turn off.** You surely knew this was coming. Take several hours during your workday to ignore your social media accounts. Close your email.

Tell your staff to hold your calls for a specified period. Use that Outlook calendar to communicate your schedule to employees when you'd like to block off time. You may not be able to implement all of these things every

working day, but think about what boundaries might help you tackle something you've been putting off.

- **Rip the Band-aid off.** Eat that frog. These mean essentially the same thing, which is to get something you're dreading out of the way as part of your first order of business. That's a great energizer. Tell yourself, "By lunchtime I can be totally in the clear of this!"
- **Whip up some pressure.** Inventing due dates is a thing. Assign yourself a deadline. See if that feels different or if it changes the way you deal with the bulkier items on your plate.
- **Delegate.** Evaluate the tasks you may be using to avoid tackling things on your list. Remember, you have a great team that wants to contribute. ■

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4 signs that fear is sabotaging your leadership potential



While learning to manage without fear is easier said than done, it may be the one critical element that separates an acceptable manager from a true leader that others want to follow.

If you identify with any of these four scenarios, it could be a sign that fear is sabotaging your leadership potential.

1. You think being a manager is about you. Effective management requires selflessness. The lens through which you view challenges, opportunities and successes should have everything to do with the people you manage and aspire to lead—and little to nothing about the impact it will have on you.

Have you ever failed to give team members credit for their work or blamed them for a misstep? Do you talk more than you listen in team meetings and employee one-on-one sessions? Do you know each of your employee's professional backgrounds before they joined your team? Could you rattle off their long-term professional interests and goals?

If the answer to any of these questions is “no,” your fear of protecting your own self-interests is standing in between you and your ability to lead.

2. You struggle to make decisions. Every decision you make sets new events into motion; this includes not making decisions. Do you find yourself frequently caught up in a sort of analysis paralysis? Do you constantly review metrics but rarely apply those findings to inform new strategic approaches? Do you struggle to provide clear and action-based direction for your team or in cross-functional meetings with peers?

Not only does the inability to make a decision or choose a direction and stick to it create organizational bottlenecks, you may be frustrating employees and presenting yourself as weak or incapable in the process.

3. You don't share information with your team. Shielding information from employees often stems from a misguided attempt at preserving a sense of power.

When you're secretive about corporate happenings, key priorities and strategic initiatives, employees don't feel like they're a part of the organizational culture or mission.

Instead of withholding what problems or competitive threats leadership is trying to solve, share what you know with employees, and invite their insights.

The more perspective you gain from the people doing the job and engaging with other teams, vendors and customers, the more clarity you can share with executive leadership about the real challenges and opportunities that exist.

4. You focus on your image with higher ups above all else. Everyone has a boss, and it's natural to want to stay in the good graces of those to whom you ultimately answer. But if you arrive at decisions based primarily on how it will be looked upon by higher ups, you're missing opportunities to bloom as a leader.

Not only are the most effective leaders focused on how to collaborate throughout the organization for maximum influence, they know that building trusting relationships with their own subordinates is as critical as their image with executives. When you lead from a place of lifting others up rather than building your own image, success will naturally follow.

Fear is a natural reaction to any type of change or uncertainty, but it doesn't have to hold you back from being the best manager you can be. ■

Stephanie Taylor Christensen is a regular contributor to Business Management Daily's Managing People at Work newsletter.



If you've got 12 or more business cards on you right now, your sign is the Rolodex.

Try taking a walk with someone today to discuss business rather than sitting down with them. Going for a walk represents a rare and impressive commitment of attention that lingers in the memory. The stars remind you that “going for a walk with someone” doesn't mean carrying a bag of golf clubs and traveling exactly 18 holes.

If you've got 8–11 business cards on you right now, your sign is the Frequent Flyer Mile.

Count the number of bullet points in that PowerPoint presentation you've scheduled for noon, and subtract from that the actual number of total slides. The remainder is roughly how many people are going to be bored stiff by the time you get halfway through. Time to tighten up!

If you've got 3–7 business cards on you right now, your sign is the Gold-plated Pen.

Today is the one day a year the stars will allow you a guilt-free ego surf of the Internet for your name. And if you don't have 25% more Google results than you did last year, take that as a sign to get more aggressive with your career. (Getting on reality TV may seem like an easy fix, but avoid it.)

Otherwise, your sign is the Out of Office Message.

Reach out to and reconnect with a former colleague today, one who's been drifting farther away from you as time has passed. The gesture will be a pleasant surprise for them, and you'll be seen as a rare, loyal ally. You might even consider finally apologizing for all those years of swiping their stapler and never once fixing the jams. ■



How much does a résumé lie matter?

Q. Recently, it came to light—only to me—that one of our star employees lied on his résumé six years ago to get the job. Our organization has a zero tolerance policy on dishonesty, so I'm in a real bind here. This person's production is really off the charts. Any advice?

A. I'm especially interested in your zero-tolerance policy and the dangers of using that phrase. Does that mean, for example, that any dishonesty of any kind, in any circumstance, results in termination? If someone obfuscates the reason they're late for work one day, are they fired? What if they know a project will be late but don't tell anyone? Are specific penalties outlined in the policy? You can see how such harshly worded ideals are guaranteed to lead to problems down the line.

What this company policy is saying, in essence, is that an employee is defined by the worst thing they do, not the best, and that's the end of the story.

As a leader, you can't suddenly rise above an agreed-upon way of doing things just because there's pain in following procedure. If the policy states harsh discipline, you're in a bind; respect it. What you *can* do is use whatever wiggle room the policy allows you to hold onto that star employee; and when the storm subsides, rewrite it to reflect the real world of business and human psychology.

I see the value in zero-tolerance policies for things like violence or harassment. But by applying it to trespasses of a more subtle nature, you may well wind up in regrettable corners like this one. ■

Z is a veteran of the corporate battlefield who answers your toughest questions with hard-charging honesty. Submit your questions to Z at LBeditor@BusinessManagementDaily.com.

Entrepreneurial Spirit

Should you reveal your side hustle?

Many people have another gig in addition to their full-time job. Should you disclose this to your employer? There's no one easy answer. There are several things to mull over before deciding on taking this step.

- **Consider your reasons for wanting to do this.** Maybe transparency is important to you. Maybe you're prepared to make a case for a raise or for taking on more responsibility. Your side hustle could actually impress your employer and show that you're motivated. You may even be able to detail how the skills you're developing through your outside work can benefit the company. And if your side gig is serious enough to involve advertising or any kind of a website or social media presence (which it likely does) then your boss will likely find out anyway, and you don't want to get caught in the trap of maintaining a lie.

- **Make sure it's legal.** Depending on the size of your company, this may just involve going back through that employee handbook. Check your onboarding package and read your contract or noncompete agreement. If there's any uncertainty or conditions that you'd like defined, request a conversation with Human Resources or, if applicable, a corporate legal rep. "Conflict of interest" can be a slippery thing, and laws differ state-to-state.
- **Stay focused on your day job.** Once you reveal your side project, one of the natural concerns your employers may have is that your attention is divided. Your performance should prove that you're dedicated to your full-time job, as you've assured your boss. If you've been at all tempted to work on your side business at your day job, now is not the time to give in. ■

Generating Ideas

Another look at brainstorming

Sure, you realize brainstorming can yield some results, if you can get your team—and for that matter, yourself—past that initial "groan" phase.

Some ground rules: It should be quick. This isn't the time to linger on a topic, or flesh it out—this is capture time. The sessions shouldn't require a bunch of planning or special materials. At the brainstorming level, the focus is on quantity, not quality.

Keep it simple and anonymous. Present the issue at hand, set a timer, and have each participant write the ideas on sticky notes, one idea per note. This way the ideas can be anonymously collected and placed on a larger board for all participants to see and discuss.

Explore the freedom of limitations. One game, called "Disregardables," involves asking each member of your team to bring three rules or guidelines taken from commonly used products: Refrigerate after

opening. Shake Well. Do not remove tag under penalty of law. Select one at a time, and try applying these rules to your group's brainstorming topic. Questions to ask might be: How does this rule help? Why was it created for the product? How is it implemented and regulated? What is a parallel concept relating to our problem?

Simplify the goal. At the start of the session, present the topic, and take a full minute to do so. Now hand it off to the next team member to explain the situation in 30 seconds, and the next person in 15 seconds. The last individual has 7.5 seconds to distill the issue. Then, as the final step, break your group into teams and have them come up with a 3.75-second version of the goal. Start the brainstorming session from there. Discuss the ways in which taking time to boil down the issue helped attack the topic. ■

— Adapted from *The Big Book of Brainstorming Games* by Mary Scannell & Mike Mulvihill.