

## DR. LOIS FRANKEL

*Get and keep the job you want.*

Workplace miscommunication is frequently caused by people feeling they've been manipulated during a conversation or, alternatively, uncertain of what is wanted from them as a result of the conversation. Here are some tips for how you can avoid these kinds of miscommunications -- especially when interacting with people senior to you.

### **Initiating Questions to Others**

1. Ask for input only when you are still open to a decision and willing to accept (or at least go away and think about) the response. Asking for input when you already know what you want the answer to be can be like trying to teach a pig to sing -- it annoys the pig and frustrates you. This alternative sounds something like this: "I've got to make a decision about how I'm going to handle the problems with the Baxter account. I'm leaning toward assigning our best account executive to them, but would like your input before I make a final decision."
2. When making recommendations for which you want buy-in, state this up front. It frames the message and lets the listener know what's wanted from him or her. It sounds similar to this, "I've been thinking about the problem we have with the Baxter account. I'm going to recommend we assign Jason to it and want to get your buy-in before I move forward." Short, crisp, clean.
3. Be clear about when a decision belongs with the other person and you are bringing it to their attention. Decisions around policy or ones simply out of your domain of expertise or authority are good examples of this scenario. Here's one example, "I got a call from Christine over at Baxter. She has some serious concerns about our pricing structure and wants a discount. We've never done that before and since it could impact our long-term strategy with them I thought you would want to make that decision." Another would be, "An employee recently asked for time off without pay to take a sabbatical to think about her career. We've never done that before and since it could impact our policy around time off, I feel it's out of the domain of my authority to make that decision. I think it would be more appropriate if you responded." The caveat on this one is that you can't just be paying lip service and do a bait and switch -- that is, when you're given an answer don't argue or debate it.
4. If you're thinking out loud and need a sounding board, say so: "I was wondering if I could use you as a sounding board for a moment. I've got to make a decision about the Baxter problem and I'd like to think out loud and see if my thinking makes sense and how it strikes you."

## **Responding to Questions from Others**

Be acutely aware that 90% of all questions are really statements couched as questions. Responding as if they were questions can get you into trouble (it starts a debate). Here are some things to consider (and even ask out loud) before responding:

1. Is this a directive? If the answer is yes, then there's no debate. If you have legitimate concerns about what you've been asked to do because experience suggests it might not work, you have to share this as an obstacle to be overcome, not one that precludes you from entirely doing as asked: "I have no problem with doing as you've asked. One potential glitch I see is \_\_\_\_\_. How would you like me to handle this if it arises?"
2. Are you asking for my input or just thinking out loud?
3. Are you suggesting you'd like me to make this decision?
4. How much involvement do you want once I intervene?

Following these few tips can make you a more effective communicator and prevent unnecessary communication conflicts. As always, let us know if you have any questions you'd like answered in our monthly tips and feel free to pass them along to your colleagues.

Best regards,

Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D.