

The Leadership Lantern™

Lighting the path of leaders!

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“He who establishes by noise and command shows that his reason is weak.”

~Michel de Montaigne

“The fellow that agrees with everything that you say is either a fool or he is getting ready to skin you.”

~Kin Hubbard

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Will Someone Please Disagree?!

A. Drayton Boylston

When was the last time you openly disagreed with someone above you in your company? When was the last time someone openly disagreed with you?

Why has it become standard practice for many to act as drones and nod their heads in unison, even at the most senior levels? What has happened to healthy disagreements?

In a previous article I discussed the “Executives’ Disease” by author Daniel Goleman- citing evidence that executives at the top universally do not hear what is truly going on within their organizations. Goleman asserts that most executives can’t count on those around them to provide candid feedback. This forces most executives into a very unproductive vacuum.

I believe that good executives are craving more candid feedback and welcome respectful disagreements from their people. I have spent many hours with executives who decry the fact that people will not disagree with them. They are looking for ways to create a corporate environment that rewards, not punishes, this practice. It takes work.

As a leader, ask yourself– What communication tone do you set for others? Do you shoot down contrary opinions when raised? Do you foster open dialog even when it may reflect poorly upon you? Do you reveal things about yourself that are not always flattering? Have you demonstrated your ability to learn from your mistakes? Are you secure enough to hear things that you may not want to?

I am not advocating blustery arguments for the sake of argument nor am I condoning less than courteous behavior. The last thing we need is another company creating a demeaning culture. What I am promoting is candid dialog, provocatively challenging statements in a healthy way.

Comments cannot be directed personally, but toward the opinion or idea in question. It will take some set up work, asking for, and also granting, permission to speak candidly. This will only happen if we give others true permission to disagree and we are secure enough to hear the answers. I believe that if your comments reflect a purity of intention, the other person will ultimately hear the real message.

Challenge the status quo– in your company and within yourself. Challenge the words of our leaders and let others challenge yours. It will take courage but the rewards will be many.



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“A man never tells you anything until you contradict him.”

~George Bernard Shaw



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