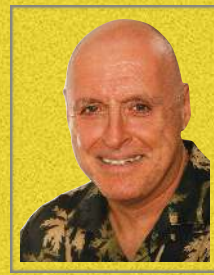


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



134 It's Okay to Say "I Don't Know."

It's a phrase that is often missing from the vocabulary of a leader, and it needs to be there. But it's not, and the reason why brings us to a very important question. I'm Jerry Roberts and we'll ask that question, and likely a few others, in the next couple of minutes on today's Extra Point.

Okay, what's the phrase?

The phrase that every leader needs to get intimate with is this one: "I don't know."

I don't know. Why does the thought of uttering those three words scare some people so?

All too often we hear and see clips of political leaders and would-be political leaders, who have a microphone shoved in their face and get asked a question they obviously don't have an answer for.

Sometimes they struggle with it and get out a response that makes it obvious they haven't thought much about the topic. And while that likely isn't going to win them any new followers, it's better than the next category.

This is where the answer has little to do with the question. The person answering doesn't have a good answer for the specific issue but can launch off on an associated topic. So they ignore the question and go their merry way. And they usually get away with it because a lot of interviewers either weren't listening to the answer, or don't have the experience or the courage to say, "I'm sorry, but you didn't answer the question I asked."

The third type is the one talk show hosts dream about. Where, once in a while, somebody who has no answer at all proceeds to give it to you in depth, wandering all over the place and never really making much sense. People listening at the breakfast

table stop chewing. Cars at the stop light don't go when the light turns green. The entire world stops and collectively says, "Say what?"

To be fair, it's not just politicians. I've seen business owners and other managers do it, too.

So why don't we just say "I don't know"? Do we think it makes us look dumb? Or that we're somehow a lesser candidate or lesser manager because we admit we don't know everything?

I produced a leadership conference here for some 15 years. Some of the best minds in the world were involved, year after year. Yet, in all that time, I think just a couple of elected officials attended and maybe a dozen CEOs. I could only think of two reasons they wouldn't want to attend. One, because they figured they didn't need it. They already knew more than the average guy on the street. Or because they'd be embarrassed to attend, because somebody might think they needed to expand their leadership capabilities, just like the rest of us. Imagine that. I'm not sure which of those reasons is worse.

"I don't know but I'm going to look at the issue and get you an answer. Give me your number and I'll call you tomorrow with what I find out and how I feel about it. How's that?" To me, that's an intelligent way to respond. It respects the question and the questioner. When you do come back with your answer it builds trust. And, my friend, in the world of leadership, that's the name of the game.

That's The Extra Point. Get out there and make something good happen today. For 93.3 and the Ray Gibson Show, I'm Jerry Roberts.

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