

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



612 Business Information That is Off the Mark

Who is set up to handle the problem solving in your organization? Is that a trick question? I'm Jerry Roberts and today, we go looking for incorrect business information being presented to younger generations. That's up next on The Extra Point.

I have said many times that I want Millennials to succeed. Their generation is slowly taking over leadership positions across most industries and they'll be calling the shots until their little brothers and sisters knock them off — and until my kid's generation gets rid of both of them.

I read a lot of what Millennials read, just to get an idea of the information they're taking in and the kind of discussion it generates. Some of it is good. Some of it is bad and way off base. Both of those are easy to recognize, understand, process, and utilize. Most of us know the good stuff from the garbage.

That said, there's one more category and it presents a danger. It's where the information seems legit but is lacking something in order to be effective — yet it gets passed around as if it's the gospel truth.

Adam Grant, a professor of Psychology at the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School, launched off on a phrase he claims is heard in a lot of workplaces: "Don't bring me problems, bring me solutions!" Adam says these words should never be spoken by any manager.

Grant likes the system in place at Warby Parker, an online retailer of prescription glasses and sunglasses. In this organization they encourage all employees to add the problems they encounter during their day-to-day work to one massive Google Doc. Then, at the end of each week, managers get to decide which problems they need to prioritize.

Wait. I have a problem and instead of trying to

work through it I add it to a Google Doc and then all the managers get together at the end of week and decide what they'll try to solve and what they won't? That's your strategy for solving problems? Do you see any problems with how they solve problems?

1. Some things shouldn't have to wait a week, or two, or whenever they get around to it. How many other people are or will be affected by this issue? Why can't we look at it now?

2. This means the only people in the shop who become problem solvers are those managers. Nobody else really has to think much. What happens when some of those managers leave? Are you going to promote the people who've never had to solve anything?

Many years ago I interviewed Bob Maloney, the CEO of PCI, a local telecom company. In the interview he offered something that I believe should be one of the pillars of the relationship between every manager and worker. He said this:

"Everyone in this company knows that they can walk through my door at any time and bring me their concerns. However, they also know not to come in here with just a problem. Come in and demonstrate that you've thought about the problem long enough to accurately articulate it and, if you've done that, you should also have a thought about how we can solve it."

He didn't say, "Don't bring me problems, bring me solutions." He said it was okay to bring the problem, but try to figure it out before you do.

Why is Maloney's system far better than the other one? Three reasons. First, that worker is the one closest to the situation likely knows more about the situation than anyone else.

(Con't.)

Who is more qualified than him/her to address the situation? Second, I want them to sweat a little over the problem and try to figure it out. Exercise the thinking muscles. And third, if they do manage to come up with the answer, I'm going to make a big deal about it and give major praise in front of the whole company, and this worker's self-esteem is going to go through the roof. That's why.

Put it all in a Google Doc? Wait a week and let the managers decide if it's worth discussing? What if they decide it isn't? Then I still have my problem and more time has passed.

Adam Grant should look at this again and rethink his position. Every worker, regardless of generation, needs to see this issue clearly. The world needs every problem solver it can get.

Every organization, large and small, needs every problem solver it can afford to keep on the payroll.

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

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