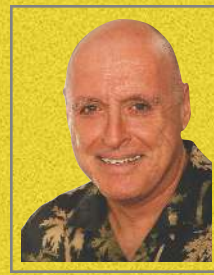


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



886 Do You Think You're the Smartest Person in the Room?

Bill was the boss, and the book on Bill was that he thought he was the smartest person in the room — and that included just about any room he was in. Then, something changed. I'm Jerry Roberts, and I'll tell you what that was, next, on The Extra Point.

Bill's a bright guy, no doubt, but he had an ego issue. He did almost all of the thinking in his company, which included making all of the key decisions. He corrected workers on minor things, in front of other team members. He always had to have the last word on every topic in company meetings.

He's not unpleasant and employees like him personally, but his leadership style had driven good people out the door. Then, Eric, a particularly promising young staffer quit, the third in the same year. Bill asked Eric to give an honest appraisal of the company and his leadership, as he exited.

Eric agreed, and Bill got an earful. He said working there was a very negative experience, because he felt squeezed and stifled, and unable to perform at a high level. Bill was surprised. It got worse, as Eric was just getting warmed up.

"We all know you think you're the smartest person in the company, and you probably are. But is it necessary to constantly remind us of that by the way you talk to us? We're not all dummies, unless you care to admit you hire dummies." Bill felt embarrassed, and apologized. What Eric said next shook him.

He hesitated, then said, "Let me tell you, I'm not the last one who's going to walk away from this place. Other people are looking for jobs. I don't know what you can do to change that but — whatever it is — you better do it fast."

Bill had never received that kind of feedback,

and it rocked him. He hired an executive coach who spent several hours with him, just observing. Together, they decided Bill would take a step back in the next staff meeting, which would allow others to make larger contributions. It was a good idea, but it didn't work.

When an issue was raised, Bill had the answer and the team knew he had the answer. He was fighting against himself and his natural tendency to roll out the solution. He held firm. Instead of telling the group what to do, as expected, he said, "What do you think? Then he remained silent.

Staffers were so used to Bill running everything, and coming up with all the answers, that Bill's silence was met with...right, silence. Workers had blank stares on their faces, not knowing what to do. Halfway through the meeting, Bill was nearly begging people to contribute, and gradually they did.

He began doing one-to-one meetings with the team, encouraging them to take more responsibility for company decisions. He would later credit them as the reason he could step away from managing everything on a day-to-day basis, and could work on expanding the business.

We've spoken several times about doing all the thinking for your team, and how that's generally unproductive. It also results in talented people leaving for better treatment elsewhere.

Look, you can still be the alpha dog. You can still be the smartest person in the room. Just know that the smartest person in the room doesn't let anybody else think he/she thinks they're the smartest person in the room.

(Con't.)

Instead, they do all they can to make workers feel valued, and needed. They help workers to see that the company succeeds because of their efforts and dedication. They motivate people to do more, and do it better.

Bill's lesson should be taken to heart. Build up your team, and let them build up your business.

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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