

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



954 Hitting the Reset Button on Professionalism

Does your team, your organization, model the positive aspects of the word *professionalism*? Are there any negatives when you think of how professional your workplace is? I'm Jerry Roberts, and we'll dig into this topic, next, on The Extra Point.

I recently worked with a small company, adding a training component to their annual retreat. They said I could have a couple of hours with the team.

What they wanted was a session that was fun, and would add value to the group. I asked a few questions, then suggested Professionalism 101, a course that has a team look inward at personal beliefs, values, and how we deal with each other.

This course began by attempting to define the term "professionalism." Most people have never done that. We all want to be thought of as professional in the way we conduct our business and ourselves, but almost nobody has taken time to break it down like this.

We started with a broad interpretation, then went through a process to narrow it down. In the end, we had a dozen good responses, but all were somewhat different. That's okay.

I won't go into all the details here. If you're interested for your group, you can reach me and I'll fill you in. However, there were some things that stood out to me.

First, this group of people, for the most part, has worked together for many years. They know each other, celebrate family events together, and have grown together.

One of the characteristics of people who have worked together for a fair length of time, is they get used to and accept each other's habits and ways. They either create workarounds for things that don't function well, ignore them, or

just don't see the problems any longer. These are "blind spots" of a sort to them, but are immediately noticed by new hires.

It's why I advise managers to talk with new employees after 60-90 days, to find out what things they've seen and may need correcting.

Part of the Professionalism 101 session is to examine a number of behaviors, all relating to values. Participants are asked to choose which of these they feel the need to focus on, then to compare notes with other team members.

I split the group of 12 into two teams, and went back and forth between the two, listening not just for the content of their answers, but for how they communicated with each other.

The tone of conversation, as well as the body language and facial expressions, paint a picture of how people communicate ideas. In addition, it displays their reactions — positive and negative — as they try to influence others to come over to their point of view.

In this exercise, one group was quieter than the other, with people finding agreement on the issues much faster. The second group was different and a bit louder, featuring a certain level of disagreement.

When discussing a topic like professionalism, both agreement and disagreement are healthy. The key is for everybody to have the chance to express their views, then learn from the ideas and opinions of others.

In the end, we compared the work of both groups for similarities and differences, and they were in sync on better than half of the issues they discussed.

That's a good score, showing they agree on key issues, while allowing for further discussion. (Con't.)

When I talk to managers about this kind of training, I tell them it's like hitting the "reset button" on company culture. It allows people to talk about things they likely have never addressed.

Doing so in a controlled environment with a facilitator offers added confidence for people to open up and talk freely.

The reviews I get from this particular course always reinforce my belief that it's essential for every organization to do so.

I regularly see comments like, "It's about time" ... "So happy we finally talked about this stuff" ... and "I never knew people felt that way."

Whether or not you ever use someone like me to lead such a session with your team, I strongly encourage you to talk about this topic.

Hit that reset button. I believe you and the folks you work with will be glad you did.

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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