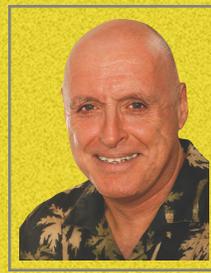


THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1468 Why Leaders Should Always Speak Last — Part 1

So you're the leader of your organization, and when you call a meeting everybody gathers around and you're the first one to speak. I'm guessing you're also the last one to speak. What if I said it would be better if you kept that last-speaker slot, but let everybody go ahead of you? Would that be weird, or silly, or not a productive strategy? I'm Jerry Roberts and I've suggested this to leaders for years, and now I've got pretty big time company joining in with my opinion. I'll tell you the who, why, and the what, next on The Extra Point.

When I published Directions magazine, we had weekly staff meetings like most companies, and I conducted those meetings. Well, it was expected that I did. I was the owner. I should be the principal speaker.

That's how it was until I decided to change things up. I let others run the meetings. If I had a contribution to make, it was after the others had said their piece. It was a different feel for me as well as the other team members. In my opinion, it was positive.

Speaking of opinions, if we hit on a topic that sparked a discussion, I wanted to hear what everybody else had to say before expressing what I thought.

In my training, when I work with managers, I advise that they do the same. A fellow named Bezos who used to run Amazon (Jeff Bezos, you might have heard of him), is in total agreement.

He said: "In every meeting I attend, I always speak last. I know, from experience, if I speak first, even very strong-willed, highly intelligent, high-judgment participants in that meeting will wonder, "If Jeff thinks that? I came into this meeting thinking one thing, but maybe I'm not right."

When you, the leader, speaks first, three things can happen and two of them are bad. One, as in the example given, people with an opinion may reconsider it, figuring that you likely know

things they don't and you must be right.

Or, they are intimidated and wouldn't think of offering up a perspective that in any way goes against yours. So, those two issues show that opinion and contributions could be stifled.

The one good thing is if somebody has the courage to go against the grain, and presents their opinion, even if it contradicts your take.

A 2013 study published in *Science* magazine found that first opinions can sway the opinions that follow. Researchers call this "accumulated herding." A 1998 study published in *Journal of Risk and Uncertainty* found that one person's opinion — especially that of a "senior" person — tends to have an outsized impact on the group. Many times, the members of that group simply fall in line with the leader.

When this happens, people swallow their good ideas, and better opportunities for the company can become lost. Just as important, it can lead to frustration for team members.

We should encourage thoughts that are don't duplicate ours. Leadership guru Tom Peters once said, "If I hire you and you agree with me 100% of the time, why do I need you?"

If you're the senior person in the room, make sure you go last. Everybody else speaks before you do. Maybe you start things off with the person who has least seniority and work back to you.

What do you accomplish with this strategy? Three things.

One, everyone has the feeling that they have been heard, and they have contributed to the meeting.

Two, they will speak without having heard your opinion, and therefore will not have any reason to filter their words. You'll get the real deal from them.
(Con't.)

Three, you have the benefit of hearing all the others, and maybe somebody will offer up an opinion that causes you to change yours.

Imagine if you then say, "You know, I was heading down a different path on this, but I like what Joe said. Further, if we marry that up to your idea, Mary, I think there's a chance we can create something special. What do you say we brainstorm a little on those concepts together?"

If you're a leader and you've always spoken first, this could represent as breakthrough for you and your team. More tomorrow.

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

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