

THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



1486 When Managers Oppose Opposing Viewpoints

An all-too-common issue in the workplace today is when people in authority make it clear that they don't appreciate opposing viewpoints from their workers. They may not say so in so many words, but the intent will be clear by body language and facial expressions. People will know. I'm Jerry Roberts and we'll chew on this a bit today, on The Extra Point.

There are leaders who exhibit a reluctance and a resistance to having their positions and ideas challenged. Why is this so?

Is it because they don't want new ideas or fresh takes on old ideas? Research says that's not the reason.

The primary factor for many is the fear of losing control or authority. They may perceive dissenting voices as a threat to their expertise or leadership style. It's an insecure position to take. It's one borne out of fear.

True leadership thrives on perspectives that are different and which challenge the status quo, the conventional thinking. Embracing differing viewpoints can lead to making better decisions and innovation.

If you're a senior leader and you know that a middle manager or supervisor fits the issue we're discussing here, it wouldn't hurt to gently make them aware that their work can be enhanced and their position made stronger when they encourage workers to voice their opinions and regularly contribute ideas.

From the worker's perspective, the issue is seen differently. When the manager shows that alternate opinions aren't welcome, it can be judged as a lack of appreciation, in addition to a power play.

This realization can lead to frustration, a decline in creativity and productivity — and perhaps overall disengagement. There's more. When workers feel that their contributions aren't valued, it may be tough to get them to step up in the future.

At a time when organizations are challenged to keep their good talent and find more people to fill out their roster, it's hard to see how this kind of attitude can possibly be good for retention.

The worst case scenario is that a toxic work environment is created. An atmosphere of distrust could follow, one which would hinder collaboration. Conflict and communication breakdowns could follow.

Here's a few ideas to help prevent the issue from getting out of hand.

1. Leaders should create an environment where employees feel safe to express their opinions without fear of retribution. As we suggested earlier, get with any managers who don't sign on with that concept. Handle any worries they may have, and get them on board.
2. Recognize and reward contributions. It's possible that workers won't speak up right away, because of how things have been. Stay with the plan, and eventually they will.
3. Take action on good ideas. The best payoff a worker can get is not your thank you for their contribution, but seeing it implemented. If you have no intent to use any ideas from your workers, it's far better not to ask for their participation. That leads to disappointment.

By actively pushing for an environment that encourages communication, collaboration, and open dialogue, good things will almost always follow.

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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