

# THE EXTRA POINT

BY JERRY ROBERTS



## # 1730 Spice Up Workplace Dialogues

Most workplace communication and dialogue follows a familiar, let's say comfortable format. We find something that works and that most people can get along with, and it likely never changes. That's especially true if the person who leads such meetings is never replaced by somebody else. I'm Jerry Roberts, and today I'm going to give you three ideas on how to shake things up a little, and get different kinds of conversations going. That's next on The Extra Point.

We hear it all the time: Effective communication is absolutely essential in our organizations. If we can't do it, woe is us. Okay, I agree with that. Most organizations — even the biggest and best — have a major problem with how workers communicate with each other.

As far as the “woe is us” part, the reality is what I mentioned in the opening statement before the break. Organizations usually find a groove, if you will, a way that is comfortable for most people, and they stick with it. That doesn't mean it's effective.

I've talked with enough senior leaders over the years to know that “comfortable” often means that everybody is used to it, and nobody fights against the process.

Meetings are predictable. They're very often repetitive, and some would say boring. Over time I've asked a fair number of participants in training classes if they would bypass their employer's regular weekly meetings if they could. More than half said they would.

It's not that they don't like their boss. It's just that, when they weighed the value of what took place in the meetings, versus the regular work they could be doing, it was an easy choice to make.

Today, I'm going to give you three ideas on how to generate different conversations among your team members, whether it's at a weekly meeting or some other time. The ideas were recently presented by workplace performance

expert Henna Pryor, and I'll tag my thoughts onto hers.

Before I list these ideas, here's one to get us warmed up. Author Susan Cain says this: “Social interactions require practice.” I had to look twice because I've been saying this in my training for three decades. Communication is a learned skill. Oh sure, some people seem like they came out of the womb able to be likeable, and engage others in wonderful and meaningful conversation, while the rest of us obviously chose the wrong parents — and have been struggling with this our whole lives.

Maybe there are some people like that, but the good news is that we can become like them through practicing. Here come those three ideas.

1. Practice asking for help. You want to create a culture where asking for assistance is encouraged can improve team relationships.

How do we do it? One effective method is to hold regular huddles where employees can practice making requests they might typically shy away from. These sessions provide a safe space for individuals to build confidence in discussing their needs.

You don't need a formal request form to do this. Everybody gets together and people start tossing out the things they need support for. You might be surprised at who volunteers to help. The important thing is for everybody to know that when they realize they've come to the end of themselves, it's time to reach out.

2. Conduct micro-disagreement drills. “Wait Jerry, you're encouraging us to disagree with each other?” Yeah buddy, I am. Conflict is often viewed negatively, but it can also be a kickstarter for creativity and innovation.

Even if not, we learn how to disagree without doing so in a disagreeable manner, and that will help us reach solutions while protecting our relationships. (Con't.)

3. Generate ongoing dialogue. This one can be great for meetings, which so often follow a rigid structure with a set agenda, the same people reporting from each department, and I'm sure you can tag onto this.

To spice things up a little, you might consider ending meetings with an unresolved question to encourage informal discussions later. You could put the question or topic on a white board, and all workers can add comments to it throughout the week. There are any number of possibilities here.

The results are reported at the next meeting, and maybe sent out in an email. I've heard of ideas like this sparking the next great project.

If communication at your place, or meetings, aren't as stimulating as they once were and you're open to trying something different, you can download transcript #1730 on our site, [guamtraining.com](http://guamtraining.com).

Let us know how it works out for you.

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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