



## Post-Training Support

### Remain Open to Ideas

Listens to others and objectively considers others' ideas and opinions, even when they conflict with one's own.

Listening to what other people have to say and trying to appreciate and understand their viewpoints demonstrate respect for them and their ideas. When people realize that they can speak up and be listened to, they are more likely to be collaborative. Consider the following situation.

A team of software engineers ignored suggestions from their customers, figuring, "What do they know?" This disregard left customers dissatisfied, required rework on projects, and damaged the trust relationship between the team and customers. With external customers, future business was lost. With internal customers, deadlines were missed and costs escalated.

The arrogance of this team was very costly. It's critical to keep such attitudes in check. Listening to and considering others' opinions can benefit you, your team, and the organization.

Following are some suggestions for remaining open to ideas:

#### **Listen and respond with empathy.**

This is an important principle of interpersonal relationships. People who know that you listen to and understand the facts and their feelings are more willing to express themselves honestly and freely. They are also more open to what you say.

To use empathy effectively, you need to do two things.

- Describe the feeling you hear expressed.
- Summarize the reasons for the feeling.

By focusing on someone's feelings, you help the person sort through and get beyond those feelings to the issue that needs to be addressed. When people feel strongly about something, they want to be sure others understand the depth of their feelings. Listening, paraphrasing, and acknowledging feelings assure people that you've made an effort to understand. As a result, people won't feel the need to raise their defenses and will be more open to trusting you.

#### **Remain nonjudgmental.**

Listen carefully to others' ideas and absorb every aspect before forming an opinion. Pay close attention to the frame of reference, the vision, and the new perspective of the situation. Don't tune out simply because you hear a minor error in fact or a flaw in reasoning.



## Post-Training Support

### **Build on old ideas as you embrace new ones.**

Don't be too hasty to discard old ideas you once claimed were good. People will quickly conclude that you were just paying lip service. Rather, revisit and build on those ideas as you embrace new ones. Ask the person to rethink the idea in terms of the current situation or in light of new information. Work together to explore aspects of the idea that have merit. As a result, you will develop better ideas and maintain the person's self-esteem.

### **Set aside time to review new ideas.**

"I won't have time to meet with you, so why don't you send it in the mail?" Nothing could be more discouraging to people who want to share their ideas. To develop a trusting environment, you must make encouraging new ideas a priority. If it's difficult to review ideas on a timely basis, explain your situation and promise to discuss them at a future date--and keep that promise.

### **Treat every idea as if it is the only one you have received.**

People think their ideas are special. Don't treat them like a number. Suppose you say, "Sorry, I haven't reviewed your idea yet, but I've already received 20 ideas just like it." How would that make the person feel? The next time you need an idea from this person, what are the chances that you'll get one?

If you actually have received similar ideas, ask the people to get together to discuss the pros and cons of each one. When people with similar thoughts get together and discuss their ideas openly, you will end up with a better idea. And the people will feel a sense of pride and ownership.

### **Provide coaching when ideas fall short.**

Remaining open to new ideas doesn't mean that you have to accept all of them. Treating every idea, even flawed ones, as highly worthwhile is risky. When only some ideas are implemented, people start to lose faith in you.

To avoid this risk, redirect the person's thinking. Point out the positive aspects of the idea and question the parts that have flaws.

### **Examples of Questions to Redirect Thinking**

- "What does this mean?"
- "What happens here?"
- "Why is this important?"
- "What are the exceptions?"
- "What are the ramifications?"
- "How does this affect (the department, the team, individuals)?"
- "Where would you like to go from here?"
- "What resources do you need?"



# Post-Training Support

Often a person simply needs another perspective to realize how to improve the idea. The attention you give will raise the person's sense of worth and produce more useful ideas in the future.

## Notes