

# Building Better Employee Relations Through Dialogue

By Carole Nicolaides

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This is a time of historically extraordinary change for most organizations and individuals. We are moving quickly from the Information Age to the Age of Communication. The exceptional turns of business events we are currently experiencing result from the need for communication. While there may be an abundance of information available, we as a society are growing farther apart and more remote. The complexity of the times demands that we build upon the strength of our collective thought and collaborative action. Simply put we need to connect and grow together again.

No wonder that due to these dramatic changes, people realize how powerful it is to create good relationships both within and outside organizations. While we might be in the midst of the Information Age, communication and information are two entirely different animals. This nostalgia of "building communities" that think together and act together has come full circle from the days of the corner store to massive corporations who need to re-learn to communicate with employees in order to build relationships and prosper.

Dialogue can greatly help in this new era with the need to connect and grow. This "dialogue facilitation" approach can assist in corporate growth, change management, customer relationship management and many other areas of organizational development.

In an environment where learning and intellectual capital is valued, dialogue can ease the process of collaboration and innovation. Dialogue enables people to listen to one another, without thinking what to answer and without personal judgment. The ultimate purpose of dialogue is to let go of the outcome and learn from the person that you are communicating with. Do you think that this is important for building authentic teams and leaders in the New Economy? You bet it is.

When dialogue is practiced in organizational settings, people are asked to learn about self-awareness before engaging themselves in unproductive collaborations. Once they are fully aware of their own emotions, idiosyncrasies, and feelings they will be better equipped to deal with them and not allow these emotions to hinder the dialogue process.

At times when teams feel unable to connect with internal and external customers or vendors, a good dialogue session is all that is needed to bring them back on track. Relationships are built on specific conversation with the intent to learn.

There is no doubt in my mind that genuine dialogue cultivates highly effective teams by building trust, increasing openness, stimulating creativity, awakening the leadership potential in everyone and accessing collective intelligence. It helps people become more effective when dealing with problems and when brainstorming for the future.

Remember that dialogue is not having a group of people talking TO each other. True dialogue involves more than that. You need to be clear about the intention of your dialogue as your intention will determine what you pay attention to and the results you get. Your intention is very important because it will shape the way everyone participates, the degree in which they open up and the productivity of the engagement.

When you choose to use dialogue in order to build employee relationships, focus on these elements:

#### Have an Open Mind

All team members should come to the conversation with an open mind. They respect each others opinion and do not try to impose their own beliefs on other people. There is no "one" right way; no opinion is more valuable than another. You cannot come and have a hidden agenda.

#### Focus on Shared Purpose

People are more likely to practice dialogue in an environment that allows them to bond, have a shared purpose and a sense of belonging. When you are in a meeting ask questions that will induce a dialogue on why everyone is engaged in that project. Why should they care? Once you bring it to the surface you will be able to bond a team, communicate the shared purpose and engage them.

#### Respect Differences

Embrace that variety; do not get stuck in labeling people just because they are different. There is always a window of opportunity to learn something from somebody that is not like YOU. Embrace that difference and allow it to flow in your dialogue sessions.

#### Share Responsibility

Once you involve people and you hold them accountable, they become responsible for their own actions and decisions. Responsibility needs to come from all levels within an organization not only the top. As a progressive leader you will need to focus all people to understand that "we" are responsible for "our" actions.

#### Listen and Speak Without Judgment

Expand your horizons of understanding by suspending your own judgment. Release the need to have the last word for each conversation and be free to learn.

#### Be Assumption Free

One of the deadly communication illnesses is that people assume. These perceptions kill relationships, teams and simply stagnate our employee relationship growth. Ask questions rather than assuming.

As you move with these principles in a dialogue conversation you will realize that the initial conversation evolves to something bigger than what it initially was. It transforms people consciously into people who know themselves better and want to learn from the people that they want to interact and work with. It changes profoundly the way we behave within organizations and with our coworkers.

Carole Nicolaidis is President of Progressive Leadership who improves organizational effectiveness and individual achievement through executive coaching, custom leadership

development programs and training workshops. Visit <http://www.progressiveleadership.com> for additional details.

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