UBA
HR Elements

Ideas and information for human resource professionals

Inspiring Others with Three Words: I Don't Know

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In this edition:

Social worker and researcher Brené Brown spent years studying shame and vulnerability. Her academic work on vulnerability skyrocketed into popular culture when she introduced it into the board room. Years ago, vulnerability was seen as a weakness, something to hide from others. You do not have to hunt far for an example. Microsoft Word currently lists weakness as a synonym for vulnerability. Dr. Brown is credited with ushering vulnerability through an image overhaul and making it safe to apply this tool in the office. Aspiring leaders can add one simple statement to their lexicon to practice vulnerability at work: "I don't know."

An "old school" leader was defined by the ability to be decisive in tough situations, exude confidence and maintain a strong composure. Managers during this era may have even hidden parts of themselves that did not fit this characterization. Vulnerability and management were like oil and water – they did not mix. "New school" leaders, on the other hand, lead by example and leave their ego at the door, allowing others to contribute and bring new ideas. They are emotionally intelligent, build trust and loyalty by being transparent with their team, and admit when they are wrong. It doesn't take a mathematician to determine that the gap between the old and new school paradigms is large. Showing up as a vulnerable leader may be a big change for some, especially for generations who grew up in an environment where directive leadership was embraced.

Change can start with allowing yourself the freedom to not always have the answer. Sounds simple, right? Truth be known, many leaders assume they need to always appear to be in control and have a limitless supply of knowledge on a myriad of subject matters. Though this expectation is found in all genders, the trait seems to shine brightest among female leaders. *Forbes* contributor Joy Burnford, surmised, "Women, in particular, are so used to fighting their way to the top that they often forget that it is normal and human not to know every answer …."

Not knowing something takes bravery to share if you have been spending years of mental capital hiding your faults and working three times as hard to make up for it.

The benefits of this small admission roll out to your team as well. By removing your voice as the dominant tone in the room, you open the floor for others to speak up and offer ideas that may not be perfect. You are modeling behavior that creates a safe place for others to admit when they don't know and gives them permission to ask for help. Your transparency with the team has a domino effect and builds momentum toward larger feats of vulnerability in the workplace. And a team full of vulnerability acrobats sounds like a group of people you would be proud to lead. So the next time you are thrown a question and your mind draws a blank, try this technique. Pause. Take a deep breath and say, "I don't know" or ask your team for their view on possible solutions. Give yourself a little grace and look for the opportunity that results from not knowing everything.

Just Say No … to Meetings

Imagine the scene. You spend weeks coordinating an important meeting: preparing a presentation with key information, making sure the "right" people are invited, and clearing your calendar so you are not double booked on the big day. And then the morning of the event arrives, and one by one, meeting attendees change their response from "accept" to "decline." You are left with just you and the Zoom room. You are crushed, the project may be delayed, and your day is thrown off course as you scurry to follow up with attendees to reschedule. This scenario is not unique in the corporate world. And while no one likes a last-minute cancellation, there are a slew of good reasons to decline a meeting with notice (emphasis on the notice!). It proves to be beneficial for all if you practice brutal honesty when evaluating meeting invites. Professionals can learn how to assess meeting invites by utilizing a few quick check techniques to evaluate whether the time and meeting are necessary.

It is easy to forget that inviting someone to a meeting is, in essence, asking them to donate their time. This ask likely means they will invest time above and beyond the meeting preparing to participate, which reduces their availability to contribute on other projects. It is all fair in love and work if the meeting is a high priority on their list. But what if the topic does not take precedence? In this situation, it is worthwhile to check out the attendee list to see if others from your department or team have also been invited. Can you designate one person to report out after the meeting instead of all attending? This quick check helps your team plan accordingly and is a good example of how you would like your team to evaluate future meetings.

Another quick check technique is to review the agenda prior to accepting a meeting. This strategy allows you to consider whether your presence is needed for the entire duration of the meeting or just a specific portion. By communicating openly with the meeting planner, you may be able to identify a shorter block of time for you to join to cover an agenda item. You may even be able to negotiate moving your agenda item to the beginning or end of the meeting so you can slip in and out of the call. It is important to work with the planner to ensure this alteration doesn't conflict with the flow of the material.

The final technique is to assess whether the meeting is set up for success. Is there a clear outline or itinerary to cover? Does the meeting have a clear purpose with necessary background? In short, you are testing the adage, "could this meeting be an email?" You can vet this by reviewing the materials available for the meeting and having a short conversation with the meeting coordinator. While this may seem pushy at first, it shows support and care if done in the right way. For example, use this conversation as a coaching opportunity if speaking with a less experienced colleague.

Learning to say no early and often not only preserves your time, it also shows respect for those around you. It increases communication and feedback with the meeting planner so they can plan accordingly. The techniques described above don't just dump the problem in the planner's lap. The quick checks help them identify alternatives and prepare for a well thought out meeting agenda. And that seems like time well spent.

Learning Styles: Are We on the Same Page?

How do you learn best? In general, humans like to know more about their personality, whether the results are pulled from a quiz in the back of a magazine or a research-backed questionnaire. As a result, many people are aware of their preferred learning styles. While it is clear that people have learning style preferences ("preferences" being the key word), research calls into question whether learning style-based teaching methods correlate to how well learners comprehend and apply material. In other words, further examination of the theory calls into doubt that a higher level of understanding is achieved when the learning style used by educators matches the style of students.

Does this mean that knowing the preferred learning style of those around you is useless? To the contrary. A major part of business communications involves catching the attention of others and a great way to do this is to cater to their learning preference. This knowledge helps you decide how to present new information to the listener, whether that be your colleague or boss, and ups the chances of a new idea receiving support.

There are more than 70 different learning style schemas. A commonly used arrangement includes three choices: auditory, visual, and kinesthetic. Here are some techniques to leverage the preferred learning styles of others when giving a presentation.

Auditory learners prefer to absorb information by hearing and talking.

Approach: A fancy PowerPoint or explainer video can be ignored with this group. This type of learner wants to engage with you, so leave time for discussion! Better yet, ask them questions to get them to relay their understanding of your idea. A good strategy when presenting verbally to this learner is to repeat key words or phrases since they latch onto catchy information.

Visual learners prefer to absorb information through images.

Approach: Those with a slant toward visual learning have a strong spatial understanding. They like to see how things work or fit together. Their attention is drawn to vivid colors, pictures and charts. They may get lost in a lecture, on a slide with too many words, or if they are in a meeting without a visual representation. A picture is literally worth a thousand words to this group.

Kinesthetic learners prefer to absorb information through engagement or physical activities.

Approach: This group needs to be involved in the action. That means giving them a chance to test out new ideas through a pilot or giving them tasks to complete that apply the discussed content. An alternative approach is to get them out of a traditional setting and moving while discussing important material. This type of learner is an ideal candidate for a walking meeting as they will be more engaged while their body is on the go.

While learning style theory has received critique in the classroom, opportunities exist to use learning styles at work. Knowing your audience helps you figure out the best tactic to present information and maintain the attention of key stakeholders. If you are short on time, a safe bet is to prepare a graphic representation, as around 65% of learners have a visual preference. But if you have more preparation time available, this is a great chance to ask your colleagues about their preferred learning styles directly. As an added benefit, this question shows you care about building a good relationship and allows you an opportunity to share your preference as well. And that sounds like a two-for-one that benefits both parties.

It's Time to Talk about Mental Health at Work

Not so long ago, discussing your mental health at work may have been considered a faux pas. The thought of sharing personal details like symptoms or a diagnosis felt unsafe in an environment where stereotypes about mental health could influence your career path or perceived potential. News flash – corporate America is coming to understand how important it is for employees to receive support for all facets of their lives, including mental health. A 2018 Peldon Rose study found that 72% of employees wanted companies to advocate for positive mental health and well-being support at work. And that number does not even account for the increase in burnout, stress and other mental health conditions that accompanied the coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic! While the U.S. does not currently mandate mental health training, HR professionals and company leadership can take the initiative to support employee mental health by drawing inspiration from best practices in the market.

One strategy companies exercise is to decrease the cost of mental health services. Discounting or waiving therapy or support group copays can incentivize employees to try mental health services they have not previously considered. Starbucks, for example, added 20 free counseling sessions per year to their benefits plan. Some employers elected to add free or discounted mindfulness or therapy apps to support the challenges of a work-from-home environment. Apps like Headspace and Better Help have gained popularity by offering great support in an easy-to-use format. If you are looking for an option that is a little friendlier on your budget, consider using resources at your fingertips. TransferWise, a global technology firm, created low-cost solutions by offering Zoom sessions that encouraged both connection and movement (think sessions like yoga and salsa dancing).

They say the first step in solving any problem is to recognize there is one. A big challenge of the mental health landscape is increasing awareness and education in the workplace. Well-meaning colleagues may not know how to respond to someone who is expressing anguish. The old school response told employees to refer colleagues to Human Resources. The new school trend proactively invests in education, so employees have a shared understanding of both the symptoms of emotional distress and the strategies to help. Mental Health First Aid is one such course that saw increased level of interest from employers in the last few years. The course not only prepares people to respond to colleagues but also relays tactics to help yourself feel better when under distress.

Employers need to champion mental health to better support employees as a whole person. For these programs to be truly successful, staff need to feel safe at work. They need to feel comfortable sharing their difficulties and believe they will not be judged for what they are thinking and feeling. Employers can take a visible stand on this topic by adding policies to prevent mental health discrimination and retaliation.

Employer Webinar

Complicated Issues under the COBRA Subsidy Rules

Tuesday, June 8, 2021 • 2:00 p.m. Eastern

On May 18, 2021, the IRS issued IRS Notice 2021-31 in the form of FAQs, which provides extensive guidance on the COBRA subsidy under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP). Previously, the Department of Labor, in consultation with the Department of Treasury and the IRS, issued FAQs written for the benefit of participants and beneficiaries regarding the temporary 100% COBRA subsidy mandated by the ARP. The much-needed agency guidance has been welcomed, but unresolved issues remain.

This webinar will focus on the agency guidance in addressing:

- The COBRA subsidy eligibility requirements.
- The meaning of Involuntary termination and reduction in hours, which are alternate preconditions for COBRA subsidy eligibility.
- The application of the extended eligibility period to state continuation coverage.
- The interaction between COBRA eligibility and ACA stability periods.
- The health and welfare benefits to which the subsidy applies.
- COBRA extensions under the emergency relief guidance.

This 60 minute webinar will provide guidance on the COBRA subsidy under the American Rescue Plan Act of 2021 (ARP).

Registration

Register here for the webinar. The presentation will be posted on the UBA Website the afternoon before the webinar.

Presenter

Lorie Maring is a partner in the Atlanta office and a member of the Employee Benefits Practice Group. She has extensive experience in all areas of employee benefits, including health and welfare programs, qualified and non-qualified retirement plans and executive compensation. She routinely advises employers, including non-profit and government employers, trade associations and employee benefit insurance and risk management consultants on the complex compliance and day-to-day issues arising under ERISA and other state and federal laws governing employee benefit plans and programs.

Certification

This webinar has been submitted to the Human Resource Certification Institute and the Society for Human Resource Management to qualify for 1 recertification credit hour.