

The “new guy”

“Good management begins with good people”

by Dennis Vicars

The late comedian George Carlin once said, “. . . The worst two days of a person’s life is the day they lose a job and the day they find one.” Losing a job is certainly scary, but starting a new one has its stress as well. Remember being the “new guy”? You meet new people who are speaking in acronyms you don’t understand. You find yourself attempting to decipher every phrase and movement so that you can quickly conform to what you think are the cultural nuances. In the company’s attempt to bring you up to speed as quickly as possible, you are ushered into several meetings with various people you will be working with and find yourself smiling, nodding, and praying that you can remember the various players’ names. You remind yourself of Mark Twain’s advice: “. . . Better to remain silent and be thought a fool than open one’s mouth and remove all doubt.”



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So this routine goes on for awhile, where one feels each day is like having an encyclopedia read to you and then slowly but surely one’s “Blink,” (Gladwell, 2005) begins to go into overdrive. All the sensory stimulation motivates the brain synapses into full question mode:

- Why do they use this metric to measure enrollment?
- Do they realize they meet a lot?
- Is technology a tool here or a hobby / obsession?
- Are they really keying in on that?
- Why do they collect this data?
- Why is this curriculum used? How does it work?
- Why are they doing it that way?

I was recently this “new guy” for the first time in a long time. The experience has been extremely valuable to me as a leader and will hopefully help with my new enterprise. I now firmly believe the two most valuable employees in your organization are your valued person(s) that has been there forever and helped build the infrastructure and processes and your “new guy” who questions why they exist.

Your seasoned professionals not only understand the processes, infrastructure, culture, educational programs, and

vision, but were probably instrumental in the creation and development. These professionals have long since become the ‘amen’ sisters that are trusted, respected, admired, and listened to by other staff, parents, vendors, and usually the greater community. Due to their institutional memory and experience, these long-term, successful employees make the operation go, from classroom to kitchen.

The “new guy’s” initial contribution, on the other hand, is the freshness she brings to the job to respectfully question (often-times silently) these very processes that have been in effect for a long time. The “new guy’s” experience, success, and ability in other venues got her hired, but her initial value to you is her observation, with new eyes, of the things you no longer even think about. A new person’s five senses are working at their highest peak. Everything is new and a curiosity. Not only do new people want to fit in and be accepted, but they want to understand everything quickly and make a positive contribution as soon as possible.

In that learning process where everything is new, comes the greatest opportunity to ask why, if not verbally, at least mentally. Most new people, out of respect for their new employer’s past successes and desire

to fit in, will never ask why and will simply adapt to the new procedures, methods, and protocols. In many cases, acceptance of tried and true success is the appropriate decision for any new employee. However, within 60 days of employment, the assimilation process is complete and the initial questions of why are long since gone. "New guy" is now old guy and the golden opportunity for tapping into possible new ideas or, at a minimum, a critique of present procedures in policies is lost.

I would never advocate for disrespect of established successful rituals, processes, programs, pedagogies, or methods; I see the wisdom in the adage: "Know us before you criticize us." Respect is earned and résumés do not necessarily give you a right to sit equally at the adult table. However, you lose opportunities for growth and improvement when you fail to set-up your new employee orientation procedures to capture possible improvements when the person's senses are most keen. New people, if given the opportunity to ask questions early in the employment cycle, offer the greatest opportunity for constant improvement to the systems we too often cherish and never question.

One idea that I plan to incorporate from my own recent experience is to have my supervisors counsel with any new hire the importance of their questions, thoughts, and insights. I want everyone hired to know that we want to answer all their questions (daily, if possible) and ask them to write down their thoughts, suggestions, and ideas so that they can be given the respect they deserve. Many, if not most, of the new person's 'blinks' and questions of why will be answered through their daily experiences and work routines. However, the one or two that are left over after the first few weeks of employment might well be the ones that make us a little better. Often, our greatest chance for improvement comes from new sources. Improvement

means being secure enough to question what you do as an organization. "New guys" can often help the process.

Remember, no one sees us with bigger eyes and ears than the "new guy" whose senses are working overtime. She obviously thought the new place of employment offered something more than the employer she left. The "new guy" wants to fit in, be accepted, and make a major positive contribution to her new employer. She didn't come to change you, she came to do a good job for you. Not to offer a new employee the opportunity to ask her questions and to share her insights and suggestions early in the game, before she becomes part of the status quo, is to shortchange your ability to improve in inches if not feet. Encouraging questioning in a safe and secure environment promotes trust and a sense of loyalty. Valuing our "new guy's" thoughts, questions, and suggestions is what gives us insight into the things we no longer question.

Reference

Gladwell, M. (2005). *Blink: The power of thinking without thinking*. New York: Little, Brown and Co.