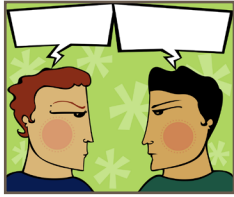




FEATURE



Confront Your Way to Success

[By Joe Takash]

Art was 58 years old when he realized that his company may have passed him by. He had been with the same employer for 35 years. Art still loved the business, enjoyed the young up-and-comers, and genuinely respected his boss. But he didn't feel like the valuable contributor that he had felt like in years past, and it had been bothering him for weeks.

Finally, Art's friend Peter asked him what bothered him most. Art replied, "The thought of being viewed as obsolete. It scares me from a career standpoint and hurts me personally. I don't know how to say this to my boss."

Peter's response was spot-on: "You just said it, but I'm not your boss."

One of the biggest challenges in corporate America today is one that even senior executives and CEOs experience on regular basis: the lack of skills necessary for *productive confrontation*. Most employees don't know how to manage their boss and often work with the fear of resentment. Many managers will not confront administrative assistants who are short, and even rude, to clients.

The good news is that most people would like to be better at having difficult conversations, but they simply don't know how to do it. The following are seven steps necessary for confronting others in a way that creates stronger relationships and increased productivity:

1. **Change the Name and Your Attitude.** Too many people look at difficult conversations as negative and counter-productive; hence, they avoid and dance around them as often as possible. Instead of thinking of it as a difficult conversation, use the term *productive confrontation*. The words you choose create the path you use. Knowing that the intended result is to help, not hurt, will give you the courage to step up and approach others about making a change.
2. **Gather Input from Credible Sources.** Seek counsel from those who you know are going to be honest with you about your view of the situation and your planned approach. It's easy to live in a vacuum without knowing your blind spots or how impaired your tunnel vision can be. Gaining different perspectives allows you to build a confident, cogent approach that can benefit you and the party you confront.
3. **Put It on Paper.** Before the meeting, prepare a bullet-pointed structure, not a script, in writing. Be sure that it allows you to communicate your viewpoint in a logical order that is easy to understand and follow for the other person. Clarifying your points with concrete examples builds momentum and makes a stronger case for being heard with respect.
4. **Be Succinct, Then Listen!** Your communication in the actual meeting is crucial. Be sure to state your intentions up front, followed by what you hope the resolution will be. Be direct and friendly by looking the other party in the eyes and speak with a confident, polite tone. Once you've made your original point(s), practice silence and be a fully engaged listener. Valuing the perspective of the other person will bring you a step closer to a productive outcome.
5. **Be as Clinical as Possible.** Emotional intelligence doesn't mean not using emotions, it means using your emotions intelligently. Whether you're intimidated, angered, hurt or resentful, try to consider the impact of how both parties will feel and focus on how everyone can benefit. This will allow you to assume a third-party, objective perspective and manage the confrontation with poise and professionalism, as well as the outcome.
6. **Agree on a Resolution.** At the conclusion of the meeting, check in to see how your message was received by the other person; then discuss what the next step should



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be for application and follow-up. This agreement can be documented and can serve as a strategic roadmap for a stronger working relationship going forward, one that can be referenced if subsequent disagreements arise.

7. **Express Appreciation:** Even if you agree to disagree with the other party, showing gratitude via a verbal thank you, short note, or a follow-up voicemail shows outstanding character and leadership. It's also more difficult for others to harbor negative feelings toward you when you show them respect and courtesy. This behavior first requires an ego-check on stubbornness and a willingness to advance relationships to a deeper, more productive level.

In the case of Art, he approached his boss honestly with his concerns and aspirations of how he still wanted to continue with the company. His boss listened attentively, and Art learned that he was not only valued more than he thought, but he was in line for a promotion in the subsequent months.



Clearly, not all corporate stories have a fairytale ending, but think of how many people wallow in negative emotions from holding back in confronting others. This wears on morale, hurts self-confidence, limits performance, and can create a lot of unnecessary regret. By preparing

appropriately and confronting honestly, you take more control over your professional destiny and demonstrate a rare leadership quality.

About the Author

Joe Takash, founder of Victory Consulting, is a business consultant and keynote speaker who specializes in leadership, motivation, and selling skills. He helps clients like American Express, Prudential and General Motors build morale, results, and profits through relationships. A syndicated columnist, Joe has been featured in *Entrepreneur*, *Selling Power* and *Business 2.0*. His forthcoming book from Wiley, *It's Not Who You Know, It's How You Know Them*, will be released in 2008. Visit www.joetakash.com or call: 888-918-3999.

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