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Title: A User's Guide To Social Software

Picture this . . . you enter a meeting and present your ideas. Everyone understands you perfectly, they see the benefit of the end result, and no one has any hidden agendas. The meeting is short, everyone bought off on your proposals and you walk out feeling successful.

Nice fantasy -- eh? Now let's talk about the real world . . . You enter the meeting and face a group of people with widely differing needs, personalities and hidden agendas. On a good day, one person agrees and another argues. On a bad day, everyone argues. The participants approach your ideas with skepticism, they don't understand the end result, and you leave thinking there has got to be an easier way to make a living.

There is an easier way. Most professionals have many tools when it comes to debugging software. Unfortunately, they have a limited toolkit for debugging human interactions. With a piece of software, we know the software won't stand up, change, and apologize for wasting our time. We know it's up to us to sleuth out the problem and change the way we are interacting with the software.

With human problems, it's easy to believe if we wait others will stand up, change and apologize for wasting our time. It can seem unfair we have to be the one to sleuth out the problems. One of my favorite cartoons shows a woman standing in a self-improvement aisle at a book store asking the salesman, "But tell me, don't you have any books on getting other people to change?"

When you work with people similar to you, you'll need less interpersonal tools. When you work with people who are different than you, you'll need highly specialized tools if you want to get what you want. Try the following:

USE THE VOICE OF AUTHORITY: To speak powerfully and persuasively use the word "I" at the beginning of sentences. Particularly when you disagree don't use the word "you" to start out sentences. For instance, "I'd like to try dividing the team into work groups." Avoid saying "You need to divide the team into work groups." When you use the word "I" you speak with credibility because no one can crawl inside your body and argue with your experience. When you use the word "you" to start out sentences, you set yourself up to lose authority since you can't speak for someone else.

When you feel defensive or angry, it is particularly important to use this tool. Saying, "I've noticed you haven't been at the last three meetings," will get you further than, "You are always late." Using "I" is more than language, you actually have to stop blaming other people and think about what you want, think and feel. Obviously, people are more cooperative when they don't feel blamed.

LEARN TO USE TELE-VISIONING: Business has been overrun with vague language. We all *should*: have a vision, be team players, support organizational goals, and be creative. Unfortunately, no one *really* knows what these words mean. When you want to be understood, imagine your end result on a television screen, and watch the behavior or outcome. When you speak, use what you saw to tele-vision your request to the other person.

For instance, "John, I'd like to have each person on the team suggest three ideas, pick the top two and get back to me by Tuesday." Avoid saying, "John, brainstorm with your team and get back to me." Using specific, behavioral, tele-vision language is critical when you disagree. Asking others for a

behavior you want is much less insulting than asking them to stop being “rude, arrogant, inappropriate, or intimidating.”

LISTEN WITH A THIRD EAR: Don’t assume you’ve understood what another person has said. Particularly in difficult interactions, repeat back in your own words what someone has said. If you use the exact same words, someone will end up handing you a cracker and think you’re a parrot.

Sometimes even when you do this technique correctly irritated people may bark, “That’s what I just said you idiot.” If this occurs try saying, “I have learned that I often don’t listen well and I want to make sure I understand you. The only way I’ve learned to check this out is to repeat back what you’ve said.” At this point, very few people will snap back, “Well stop it! I just hate it when people try to understand me.”

There are three benefits to repeating what other people say. First, you understand what’s going on. Second, so few people get listened to well in life that people will bond with you and trust you. Third, if the other person has hidden agendas, it gets hard to hide them when you listen with a third ear. This tool also confronts hidden agendas gently.

WARNING: Make sure you keep it clear that you are asking a question about what you heard and not making a statement. People get highly annoyed with others who make assumptions about them.

AVOID THE ROYAL “WE”: Unless you are the sovereign ruler of a small country, don’t use the word “we” in planning. For instance, “We need to get speed increases on this application now.” Others around you will resent you speaking for them and be interested in bucking your control. You also lose your voice of authority because you didn’t start with the word “I.” Obviously you will use the pronoun “we” when describing past interaction such as, “we went to lunch.” Just don’t use “we” to assume others agree with you unless you enjoy power struggles.

DEVELOP EMOTIONAL RADAR: The biggest stumbling block in workplace effectiveness isn’t technical incompetence but lack of emotional awareness. Old angers, hurts, losses, and betrayals can circulate like viruses stalling productivity between people. Many of my clients complain that people should be logical. Unfortunately, only machines are logical. If you don’t recognize your own emotional issues and others vulnerabilities, what you don’t see will hurt your success.

SEEK OUT COMMUNICATION RESOURCES: Be patient with yourself as you practice. All you have to do is look around your workplace to blow up the myth that people skills are natural. Seek out books, seminars, or get communication coaching to develop your expertise. Watch and learn from people at work that are interpersonally skilled.

WARNING: If you try to use any of these tools to be manipulative, eventually people will figure it out and cease to trust you. The only way to succeed long-term with your new tools is to make sure you are looking out for the interests of the other guy. The golden rule turns out to be a most profitable piece of advice.

By using all these tips you’ll have a whole new set of tools to differentiate yourself from other professionals in an increasingly competitive market. You’ll understand and be able to influence different people no matter who you are talking to or where.

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bought off on your proposals and you walk out feeling successful. And, the best part is this is now your daily reality.

Daneen Skube, Ph.D., is Director of Interpersonal Edge; a firm specializing in helping people achieve peak performance through communication skills. She provides executive telephone coaching, speaking, and conducts management training. She's an internationally syndicated columnist for Tribune Media and author of, "Interpersonal Edge: Breakthrough Tools for Talking to Anyone, Anywhere, About Anything," published by Hay House. To receive her free newsletter or submit questions for her column go to: www.interpersonaledge.com.