

“Demand Pull”

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When we adult humans need information, we'll pull it from whatever source we can find! Let me offer an example. Several years ago, my wife and I purchased a trailer to use for occasional weekend getaways. Unfortunately, we had no vehicle powerful enough to pull the 5000-pound load.

We shopped, deciding a used Ford Explorer would meet our needs. A friendly salesman helped us search the charts in the “RV and Trailer Towing Guide.” We found we needed a minimum of a V-6 engine with at least a 3.73 axle ratio. I know what a V-6 engine is, but I knew nothing about axle ratios!

A code stamped on the rear differential designates the axle ratio. “D4” is the code for a 3.73 axle ratio. I had lived for over fifty years, and I never wanted to know any of that information. Yet for three weeks, I crawled under many Ford Explorers, looking to find that two-digit “D4” rear axle code!

When we humans have a desire to learn something, we'll seek that information wherever we can find it. That's certainly one of the reasons for the success of the many electronic tools for accessing the internet.

We don't have the same intensity for learning when someone else is pushing an agenda on us. This reality applies to my coaching practice. I use the terms “demand-pull” and “agenda-push” with my clients to describe this information-transfer phenomenon. (In economics jargon, “cost-push” is the opposite of “demand-pull”.)

An example of “demand-pull” is when your teenager is focused on obtaining a driver's license. Offers to drive to accomplish errands occur several times a day. Every spare moment is spent studying the “Driver's Handbook.”

“Agenda-push” is what occurs when you attempt to teach your teenager almost any other life skill you consider valuable. Your teen thinks either it's irrelevant or believes he or she already knows everything about the topic!

The “demand-pull” concept comes from the economic law of supply and demand. When you as a leader discern the need to enhance effectiveness, you'll seek to “pull” the answers (or at least some explanatory concepts) from whatever source you can find--an article, a book, a more experienced leader, a mentor, or a coach.

When you as a leader want to support a direct report in enhancing his or her skills, you may face an “agenda-push” situation. You see the opportunity clearly, but the developable team member may not see it that way. You may offer unsolicited advice, which few people appreciate. You may “push” your agenda, and he or she may be feeling unwelcome pressure. That potential future leader may resist, missing the potential benefits that could be gained by considering and investigating your suggestion.

If you have ever been in a mentoring relationship, you recognize the contrast between these two situations. It is far easier to support the mentee when he or she arrives at the meeting having identified a desired outcome or a problem to be solved. You are free to generate options, helping the individual evaluate potential scenarios. Your insights and experience stimulate and encourage. New learning is followed by additional questions.

When the mentee shows up unprepared, however, looking to you to suggest an agenda for your conversation, you are put in an awkward “selling” position. You want to serve, and you realize the time available to beneficially influence the individual is limited. You offer some observations and hope that they address a need. Sometimes your suggestions stimulate a great dialogue, but often they fall flat. By failing to bring a relevant agenda item, the mentee has lost an opportunity not only for his or her growth but to enhance the relationship.

Teach those you serve to prepare themselves for your collaboration. Though you may have terrific insights to share, your experience will support them far better if they specify a particular situation to address, a process that's not working well, or an outcome to work toward.

If you are privileged to have a mentor or a coach, prepare for your opportunities to engage their creativity and support. Keep a list of potential topics to explore in your appointment calendar. You'll find that the more subject matter you identify, the more creative you will become in expanding the list of possible conversation topics!

I coach leaders, and I'm far more valuable to them when they have prepared for our sessions. Though I have topics I think are valuable for ALL leaders, my clients are best served when they have specific “demand-pull” needs. I am viewed as so much more relevant and competent when I am responding to the client's agenda.

I prefer to save my “agenda-push” topics for sharing in articles like these that are posted on my website!