

A Desired Outcome and an Agenda to Get There

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Early in my career, I felt my meetings with my boss were to hold me accountable for progress against the commitments I'd accepted. I went into the meetings prepared to report on my activities for the week. Usually the meetings went well. My boss asked questions, and I gave a status report of progress.

Occasionally, there would be an awkward silence. I waited for my boss to ask questions or to offer new direction. When a transferred manager replaced my boss, the first few meetings seemed very strained. I wondered why I was having such a difficult time building a relationship with him.

After the first couple of awkward meetings, my boss suggested that we spend our next session agreeing on a process to make our meetings more effective. I thought surely that was "boss talk" for giving me some negative feedback. Actually, it turned out to be a great experience at setting expectations.

He asked me to describe the purpose of our weekly meetings. I said that it was for him to give me direction on what needed to be done and for him to confirm that I was making progress on the commitments I had adopted.

He asked me to consider a different approach. Of course, I immediately thought, "Oh no, have I been doing something wrong?" He assured me that what he proposed would be much better for both him and for me, but that I had no reason to be concerned that I had been "messing up."

He explained that he knew I was working consistently and diligently. He had no need to justify each week that I was earning my salary. From information I shared in daily conversation and in reports he received from others in the organization, he knew that I was generous in my support of others and that my work was consistent with the organization's values and goals.

His suggestion was that I come to each meeting with a desired outcome in mind. Maybe I wanted his input. Maybe I wanted his concurrence on a proposal. Maybe I wanted some expertise.

The second suggestion was that I propose an agenda for achieving the desired outcome. For example, maybe I have questions. Or perhaps I have some options already, and I want his additional thoughts. Or maybe I have conducted research with my peers, and I want to share my proposal and seek his thoughts about the risks and other potential downside to my plans.

Wow! What a great insight! It made our conversations far more effective. It was demanding on me, because I had to prepare for every meeting I had with him. But the preparation was very beneficial!

I knew that if I would spend the time to prepare for my meetings with him, I would be empowered to take action with others I influenced. I also knew I could come back the next week and ask him to celebrate great progress together! Or I might ask him for specific help if some unexpected glitch had occurred.

As a coach, I now use the same guidance as I work with my clients. I want my clients to come to their calls with a desired outcome in mind and a suggested approach to achieve that outcome. If I have suggestions to make, I'll find a way to introduce them.

It's very much like taking a trip. If you need to visit Chicago, you can fly, or drive, or hitch-hike. It's very helpful to know that Chicago is your destination. Once you know that, you can be pretty sure that driving south from Atlanta won't help you get there!

You consider the time involved, the cost of the travel, and the need to engage others in your plans. If you have unlimited time, maybe you'll make no plans and just go wherever you decide to drive.

But most of the time, you have a destination in mind and a planned route to arrive there. So it is in the workplace. And it's no different in using a coach. Why not offer your thoughts at the beginning of the conversation? It will make the whole dialogue much more effective for both parties!

Leaders who seek improved approaches and systems find Dennis Hooper's help beneficial. Contact Dennis at dhooper2@juno.com or (478)-988-0237. Visit his website at www.buildingfutureleaders.com.