

Three Goals for Every Encounter

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Some of my previous articles have advocated Stephen Covey's second of his *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People*: "begin with the end in mind." If you are not familiar with Covey's 1989 business classic, this "habit" is to think through every activity with a clear vision of your desired outcome.

The purpose of today's article is to expand on Covey's concept. When you engage with a team member, I suggest you briefly envision not only the task you want to initiate, but also how the conversation will enhance both the identity of the person and the health of your relationship with him or her. Let's look at each of these three complementary goals.

Task. When you want to accomplish an objective, you seek out the appropriate members of your team. Perhaps you'd like to delegate a responsibility. Maybe you need some information. When you contact that person, you want to stimulate progress.

Because the desired task is usually the driver for your initiative, your focus could be solely on **what** you want to accomplish. However, you can also be intentional about **how** you engage that person.

Identity. Pause for a moment before you charge off to accomplish the task at hand, realizing that the real live human being who will soon be your focus has an existing self-image. It may be strong and confident, or it may be timid and weak--or likely somewhere in-between.

That person has strengths, limitations, and some degree of commitment. Filling some existing role in your organization, the individual has a perception of how well he or she is fulfilling that responsibility.

What effect will your engagement with this person have on his or her identity? As you communicate the task, will you enhance this individual's self-image, or will you take a chunk out of it?

Your goal, before you ever move in the direction of that person, could be to enhance his or her sense of identity. Could she come away from her contact with you a more confident contributor? Will he support and encourage the next person he meets, or will he pass on a critical, demanding, or even condemning perspective?

What is your goal, prior to the encounter, to influence that person's sense of self?

Relationship. The task you want to accomplish with this interaction may be short-lived. However, that person's impression of relationship with you will last for a long time.

The third and perhaps most important goal with each interaction is to strengthen the relationship bonds. Will that always happen? Probably not, but your being intentional prior to initiating the exchange raises the probability that mutual respect and likeability are favorable outcomes.

If you've been a results-oriented, "get 'er done" type of leader, you can become more effective by heeding the recent research that describes the power of emotional intelligence. "**How** you influence" may have more of an impact on your organization than "**what** you accomplish."

Three goals: a **relationship** goal, an **identity** goal, and a **task** goal. Commit the letters R-I-T to memory. Place a small box of Rit dye in your office as your frequent reminder.

The idea for this article came from research conducted by Allison M. Scott, assistant professor of communications at the University of Kentucky. She studied conversations among family members as a parent is nearing death. She concluded that the conversations are significantly enhanced when the relationship and identity goals are considered at least as intentionally as the task goals.

If R-I-T is good enough for end-of-life family decision-making, R-I-T will probably also benefit your organization's culture. Make R-I-T intentional and conscious until it becomes your routine habit!