

How Good am I at That?

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This past week, I was conducting an awareness-raising session for a group of individuals. They weren't blatant about it, but their response to many of my points was some version of "We already know that!" Despite my efforts, I could tell I wasn't helping them very much.

Maybe they understood the material, but I don't think they routinely execute it. They were resisting what I offered when I thought they should be asking challenging questions about how to enhance their behaviors. I was stymied in knowing how to help them improve.

A day later, still contemplating my frustration with how I could have better served them, I happened upon the website for Jeffrey Gitomer, entertaining speaker and author of several books, including *The Little Red Book of Selling*.

There I found the insight that expanded my awareness to the next level! "Change your listening and learning habits from 'I already know that' to 'How good am I at that?'" What a simple shift in thinking! I would have loved to have had the presence of mind to use that line two days earlier.

I realized that when I share material, I have an assumption that is probably different from my audience's beliefs. They presume they are listening for new information to compare against what they already know. Yet I'm assuming my presentation is an opportunity for them to evaluate how they might execute behaviors more effectively.

Maybe it's the way I was raised, but every time I listen to a presentation on effective behaviors, I beat myself up for inadequate performance. In the back of my mind is this voice saying, "Hey, Dennis, you're not doing that very well, are you?" For example, it seems to happen every Sunday morning as I listen to the preacher's sermon. Usually, I can envision lots of opportunity for improvement!

With this week's discovery, I am now aware that I can serve my clients better if I move from an unexpressed assumption to sharing an initial explicit expectation. My plan is to explain that the participants should measure themselves against a standard that stretches them.

If they conclude that they are already performing well, they should rededicate themselves to serving as role models and mentors in building future leaders. That's a primary message that I deliver to leaders--by more actively developing their direct reports, they will be far more effective in their efforts to achieve desired organizational outcomes!

If the session participants conclude that their behaviors could use improvement, I'll encourage them to generate tangible plans for accomplishing that growth. Of course, I will help them make the changes that will move them in the direction of their desired outcomes and ultimate success.

My initial frustration that led me to search for this insight was the behaviors of others. But I realize I can't control the choices of anyone but me. I know that if the situation is going to improve, I'm the one who will have to change.

That's the way it is with leadership! As a leader, you don't control the behaviors of anyone but you. Sure, you have influence with those under your authority. However, if you are not initially successful at achieving what you desire, YOU are likely the one who will have to change to be more effective.

As you read books and articles, listen to podcasts, or participate in conferences, I encourage you to be sensitive to your thoughts. If you find yourself thinking "I already know that," try challenging yourself with "How well do I do that?" instead.

If you want to improve your organization, call Dennis Hooper at 478-988-0237. You can learn about his work from his website, www.buildingfutureleaders.com. Or e-mail him at dhooper2@juno.com.