



## Coaching Works *Monthly*

**It's a Matter of Perspective!**

**January 2008**

### Tools and Tips

**The less you assume, the more you know.**

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**The more you know, the more you know that you don't know.**

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***When you know that you don't know, good questions are your best answer.***

### Food for Thought

**"The facts are friendly"**

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***Carl Rogers***

### Need Help?

***To learn more about how Coaching***

### Is it Still Raining in Reading?



While studying Meteorology at Penn State during the mid-1970's, this story caught my attention. It seems that on one particularly dark, dreary, December day, a light rain had been falling across much of the eastern half of Pennsylvania. The National Weather Service predicted that the rain would end during the afternoon, with clearing skies expected across the entire state by nightfall. In fact, by sunset, all but one of the state's weather observation stations reported clear skies. The lone exception was in the town of Reading, where clouds and light rain were still being observed by the local weather observer.

At 5:30 p.m., the National Weather Service revised the overnight forecast for the state; instead of being clear and dry, it was changed to include partly cloudy skies with a slight chance for rain. As the night progressed, every weather observation station in the state, with the exception of Reading, reported clear skies and dry conditions in their hourly updates. Reading, however, continued to report cloudy skies with light rain. And so it remained until daybreak, when the sun rose brightly from the east, and all weather observation stations, including the local weather service office in Reading, reported sunny and dry conditions.

What happened?

That's what the lead forecaster at the National

*Works can help open the lines  
of communication in your  
business,*

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**Questions, Comments,  
or Suggestions?**

**We'd love to hear your  
feedback!**

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**If you have any other topics  
of interest,**

[Please let us know!](#)

Weather Service wanted to know, when he arrived at work that morning. Mystified as to why it rained in Reading all night long, as well as to why rain was even mentioned in the state forecast (when he'd left the day before, the official overnight forecast was for clear skies), he got on the horn, and talked with the weather service in Reading, as well as with the forecasters from his own office on duty from the previous night.

Here's what he discovered. The Meteorologist working the overnight shift in Reading had arrived early - 2:30 p.m. - at which time, it was still sprinkling lightly outside. When making his hourly weather observations that afternoon (3:00 p.m. through 5:00 p.m.), he peered outside from his office window, saw wet pavement, and with a dark December sky looming overhead, assumed that it was still raining. Accordingly, cloudy skies and light rain were officially reported in Reading.

Meanwhile, back at the National Weather Service office headquarters, the forecasters on duty were preparing to update the evening forecast for Pennsylvania. By 5:00 p.m., satellite and radar data depicted clear and dry conditions across the entire state, and with the exception of Reading, all surface reporting stations were indicating the same. Despite this data, however, the hourly reports from Reading were assumed to be correct, and the overnight forecast was changed from clear and dry, to partly cloudy with a slight chance for rain. At 5:30 p.m., this new forecast was disseminated statewide.

Shortly thereafter, the Meteorologist on duty in Reading ripped the latest official National Weather Service forecast off the wire, and noted that there was a slight chance of rain overnight. With that in mind, each time that he looked out the window to complete his hourly weather observation, he noted the damp pavement, assumed that it was still raining, and beneath a pitch-black nighttime sky, reported cloudy skies with light rain. As soon as the sun rose, both the observations and the forecast were changed accordingly.

From that point forward, all Meteorologists on duty were instructed to go outside, when checking the weather.

This rather amusing anecdote came to mind as a result of a conversation I'd recently had with a client, on how making assumptions can wreak havoc in the workplace, and how shedding a little light on the subject, can help clear the air.

Assumptions are simple, convenient, and almost effortless short-cuts to the truth, without ever having researched what the truth actually might be. Many assumptions are benign, historically based, and highly likely to be true (assuming the sun will rise tomorrow). Other assumptions, especially those made about people, run the risk of being way off target. Ironically, since these assumptions are often fueled by uncomfortable emotions, they can also create a "Catch-22" which becomes a self-fulfilling prophecy.

For example, your supervisor comes into your office with a grimace on her face. You feel uncomfortable, assume that you've done something wrong, and immediately become defensive. She ends up becoming annoyed with you, tells you that you've stepped out of line, and walks out. Based on her reaction, you justify your reaction. What your supervisor didn't tell you was that she just came back from a painful visit to the dentist.

Since assumptions can be so compelling, convincing, and powerful, they're worth treating with caution. If they become embedded in the workplace culture, they'll have a profound impact on communication effectiveness, levels of trust, loyalty, morale, motivation, teamwork, leadership, productivity, and performance. In the end, everyone suffers, including the bottom line.

Mindful of this, here are some assumptions commonly found in the workplace, which can derail the efforts of those who work there, and the business itself:

- Business isn't personal (I can just leave my emotions at the door)
- Everyone is just as motivated as I am
- Management doesn't have a clue as to what's going on around here
- You're interested in the gossip I'm spreading
- We're all alike

- Emotional strokes aren't necessary, because we're paid to be professionals
- My opinion doesn't count
- You've understood everything I've just said
- People will always tell me what they really think
- I'm irreplaceable
- Management has it's finger directly on the pulse of what's going on around here
- I agree with everything that you've just said
- That which is important to me, is just as important to everyone else
- Since I'm the boss, I'm the only one who has a clue
- Things will never change around here

On the other hand, having proactive strategies in place, will help reduce the negative influence that assumptions have in the workplace. Here are a few, which will help do the trick.

- Utilize supportive, non-judgmental frameworks throughout the entire organization with which to talk openly, honestly, and effectively, rather than attempting to communicate indirectly, from a distance, behind a silo, or not at all.
- Develop a cultural mindset in which asking questions directly, especially on difficult subjects, is encouraged, rather than discouraged.
- Make laundry lists of assumptions brought into the workplace, and provide the means for all who work there, to air them out.
- Schedule regular "reality" checks, both among and between staff and management. Include time during daily/weekly meetings to check-in, air out concerns, ask questions, and give honest feedback.
- Actively promote teambuilding throughout the organization. Utilize personality inventories, such as the WorkPlace Big Five ProFile (WB5P), to help employees, team members, and leaders see the bigger picture as to the differences and similarities among themselves

and each other.

- When hidden assumptions are unearthed, be proactive, rather than reactive. Each assumption brought out to the light of day, becomes a new opportunity for growth.

Remember, when left to their own devices, assumptions inevitably take on a life of their own. When in doubt, put your own light on the subject. If the sun hadn't risen that December morning in Pennsylvania, it might *still* be raining in Reading!

Here's to your success!

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