



**A Selection of Our Favorite
*Two-Minute Reads***

for Improving Your Performance at Work

By Molly Fogel, Taylor Viering and Susan Cain

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Introduction

Corporate Learning Institute provides training and coaching for organizations to get them running smoothly and effectively because there is always room for improvement. With this collection of our favorite Two-Minute Reads, you will get some free tips and tools that will get your organization working just a bit better. If you would like more of these quick, helpful reads, visit our website at www.corplearning.com.



Communication

Communication is a skill that is especially important in the workplace. There are more parts to good communication skills than just being able to talk well.

Following are some tips and tools that you can use to brush up on your communication skills.

Giving Effective Feedback Using the Same/More/Less Model

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D, Taylor Viering & Molly Fogel | Corporate Learning Institute

Same/more/ less is a feedback process that can be done one-on-one, many-on-one, or many-on-many, making it perfect for providing feedback to individuals or small groups such as project teams or committees. The goal is to recognize the behaviors and skill sets that deserve recognition and should be encouraged as well as finding methods for positive growth.

Start by jotting down some ideas you have about the other—things that you value and want to continue to see. 'Same as' are those traits that you value and don't want to lose. Many traditional feedback methods end up glossing over these items, and as a result the behaviors that should be reinforced are not.

Then add 'More of'—these are those traits that you want to encourage. It may be a newly acquired skill, or the beginning of a behavior, or it may be an area where something is lacking and you want to help that person find a way of bridging the gap.

'Less of' are those traits that have simply gone too far. They may be great traits, but may be overused, and things need to return to a more balanced state. The important thing is for everyone involved to remember what he or she is doing well. It's not supposed to be painful for anyone. There is nothing to be defensive about. We're just making sure everyone is in tune with each other.



Same/More/Less Worksheet

Your name: _____

Person you are giving feedback to: _____

- 1. What can this person continue to do that works well? (1-3 items)**

- 2. What can this person do more of to be a better performer, or to improve your relationship? (1-3 items)**

- 3. What can this person do less of to improve their performance or your relationship? (1-3 items)**

Key Phrases for Collaboration

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D & Taylor Viering | Corporate Learning Institute

For some of us, especially introverts, it can be difficult to interject our ideas into a fast-paced conversation. Try some of these phrases as interjections to gain control of the floor and foster a collaborative conversation.

Key Phrases for Clarifying

- Tell me more about...
- Just because I am unclear, can you clarify...
- Can you help me better understand...

Key Phrases for Challenging

- I can see your point, but...
- Perhaps, but don't you think that...
- I agree to some extent, but...
- I like your point, but...
- I tend to think...
- But what about...?
- Yes, but on the other hand...
- I am afraid I cannot agree with...
- I think that's debatable.
- Let me push back on you...

Key Phrases Asking for Opinions

- What are your views on...?
- What are your feelings about...?
- What is your opinion of...?

Key Phrases Following up a Question

- I think you've answered a slightly different question. What I would like to know is...
- I understand that but what I actually had in mind was...
- Perhaps I didn't make my question clear. In fact what I asked was...

Key Phrases for Describing Objectives/Intentions

- What I intend to do is to explain...
- Today, I'm going to talk about...
- My topic today is...
- What I'd like to do is to discuss...
- The purpose of this talk is...
- This talk is designed to...

Key Phrases for Advising/Persuading

- Don't you think it would be better to...
- My advice would be to...
- I can offer some insight about...
- Why don't you...
- I think you should...
- I think it would help you if...
- You might want to know that...
- Let me help you with...

The Reflective Language of Collaboration: Key Phrases

Follow these four steps in consecutive order to guide a conversation towards collaboration.

1. Paraphrase to promote reflection:

In other words,...

Let me make sure I understand...

2. Clarify to promote reflection:

Tell me what you mean when you...

It would help me understand if you would give an example of...

So, are you saying/suggesting that...?

3. Mediation stems:

What do you think would happen if...

How do you come to a conclusion about...?

What is the impact of... on...?

4. Find a solution together through suggestion:

The research in this area shows...

A recent article in ... said that...

There are several other approaches...



Conflict

It is inevitable that there will be conflict in the workplace. Knowing how to resolve conflict effectively and with everyone's best interests in mind will make conflict seem less like a threat to your organization. Following are some tips and tricks you can use next time conflict rises.

DiSC: Four Responses to Conflict

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D, Taylor Viering & Molly Fogel | Corporate Learning Institute

Each DiSC personality responds differently when faced with conflict:

D: Demand. Over assertive, autocratic, unbending, over-controlling, strong-willed, attempts to impose thoughts and feelings on others.

Under pressure: demanding. Extreme reaction: leaves.

i: Attack. Explosive, emotionally attacks others and their ideas, uses condemnations and put downs to discredit others, tells people how he/she "feels" about things.

Under pressure: over-sells. Extreme reaction: gives up, may pout.

S: Avoid. Less assertive, keeps thoughts and ideas to self, more controlled, withdraws from other people and/or undesirable situations, plans next move.

Under pressure: gives in. Extreme reaction: acts hurt, accuses.

C: Comply. Gives in to keep peace and reduce conflict, appears to agree with others, tolerates things even though he/she may disagree, desires to save the relationship even if it hurts them the most.

Under pressure: can't decide. Extreme reaction: emotional attacks.

The better you know how your employees or coworkers will respond to conflict, the better prepared you will be to resolve it.

Managing Change

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D & Taylor Viering | Corporate Learning Institute

Every individual goes through the following four-stage process when dealing with change:

Stage 1: Avoidance and minimizing

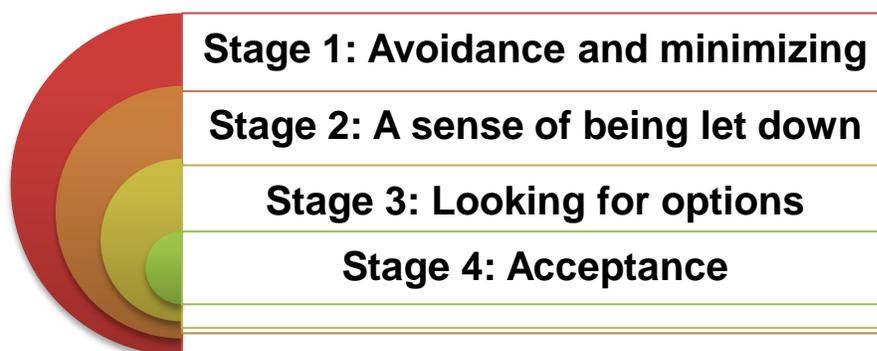
Stage 2: A sense of being let down

Stage 3: Looking for options

Stage 4: Acceptance

The difference between individuals is the length of time it takes for them to go through each stage. Some can move through the four stages in a matter of minutes, yet some take years to move through one stage. In fact, some people will get stuck in a stage. When a person gets stuck in a stage, there is a high probability it will be in the Betrayal stage. They feel that their organization has not only let them down, but is working against them. This feeling can lead to anger, resistance, and depression. As you know, this is not good for the employee and those around them. If you get stuck, think about using your strengths, creative thinking and support to get through.

The Change Cycle





Daily Work Skills

Daily work skills are skills that you use every day at work, whether you know it or not. Even though these are skills that are constantly practiced and may seem like common sense, it doesn't mean that they couldn't use some polishing with the following tips and tricks.

Making Good Corporate Decisions

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D & Taylor Viering | Corporate Learning Institute

When making corporate decisions, you need to look into the following four areas. The goal is to get a yes for each question. If not continue the discussion until there is greater clarity.

Write in the topic that you are trying to make a decision on.

- | | | | |
|---------------------------------|-----|----|----------|
| 1. Is it good for our Customer? | Yes | No | Not Sure |
| 2. Is it good For the Company? | Yes | No | Not Sure |
| 3. Is it good for the group? | Yes | No | Not Sure |
| 4. Is it good for me? | Yes | No | Not Sure |

Using Soft Skills to Make Your Hard Skills Shine

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D | Corporate Learning Institute

To get, and keep, a job you typically need a repertoire of technical skills. Dentists need to know how to fill cavities. Secretaries need to type 100+ words per minute. Accountants need to be certified.

Beyond the technical skills, though, which dentist do you go to? The one who is pleasant and takes time to answer your questions, or the one who treats you like a number in a long line of numbered mouths?

Which secretary do you retain when times are lean? The one whose attitude is positive and upbeat, and who is always willing to help, or the one who is inflexible and has a hard time admitting mistakes?

Likewise, think about accountants. The one who has a great work ethic and encourages his colleagues is the one who will, most likely, excel in his position and organization.

In these situations, and all the others like them, it's the soft skills that matter.

While your technical skills may get your foot in the door, your people skills are what open most of the doors to come.

Your work ethic, your attitude, your communication skills, your emotional intelligence and a whole host of other personal attributes are the soft skills that are crucial for career success.

With these soft skills you can excel as a leader. Problem solving, delegating, motivating, and team building are all much easier if you have good soft skills. Knowing how to get along with people—and displaying a positive attitude—are crucial for success.

The problem is, the importance of these soft skills is often undervalued, and there is far less training provided for them than hard skills. For some reason, organizations seem to expect people know how to behave on the job. They tend to assume that everyone knows and understands the importance of being on time, taking initiative, being friendly, and producing high quality work.

Assuming that soft skills are universal leads to much frustration. That's why it's so important to focus as much on soft skills training and development as you do on traditional hard skills.

The Soft Skills Gap — Do You Have One?

When your workforce has lots of technical skills but an absence of soft skills, you have a soft skills gap. Soft skills are what accompany the hard skills, and help your organization use its technical expertise to full advantage.

- If you're really good at getting clients, and not so good at retaining them, chances are you have a soft skills gap.
- If you have lots of staff turnover and have to keep retraining people, chances are you have a soft skills gap.
- When you have lots of managers but no real leaders, that's a soft skills gap.

In fact, whenever you are unable to capitalize on the wealth of knowledge, experience and proficiency within your team, then you should be assessing the level of communication and interpersonal skills that are present in your organization.

The workplace has evolved an interpersonal dynamic that can't be ignored. The acts of listening, presenting ideas, resolving conflict, and fostering an open and honest work environment all come down to knowing how to build and maintain relationships with people. It's those relationships that allow people to participate fully in team projects, show appreciation for others, and enlist support for their projects.

It's important for you to recognize the vital role soft skills play within your team and not only work on developing them within yourself, but encourage their development throughout the organization. Areas to examine and evaluate include:

- Personal accountability
- The degree of collaboration
- Interpersonal negotiation skills
- Conflict resolution
- People's adaptability and flexibility
- The clarity of communications
- Creative thinking
- Inclusion
- Coaching and mentoring

The more of these things you see around you, the better people's soft skills are likely to be within your organization. These all have a significant impact on the attitude a person brings to interactions with clients, customers, colleagues, supervisors, and other stakeholders. The more positive someone's attitude is, the better that person's

relationships will be. That's what fosters great team performance, and leads people to contribute strongly to the organization's vision and strategy.

Traditionally, people don't receive adequate soft skills training, either during vocational instruction or as part of on-the-job training.

Key Points:

Soft skills are increasingly becoming the hard skills of today's work force. It's just not enough to be highly trained in technical skills, without developing the softer, interpersonal and relationship-building skills that help people to communicate and collaborate effectively.

These people skills are more critical than ever as organizations struggle to find meaningful ways to remain competitive and be productive.

Teamwork, leadership, and communication are underpinned by soft skills development.

Since each is an essential element for organizational and personal success, developing these skills is very important and does matter... a lot!

Questions to ponder:

1. How can developing soft skills help you develop your career as a leader?
2. What soft skills would be useful for you?



Leadership

Without a good leader or effective leadership skills, an organization would struggle to get anywhere. A leader, manager or supervisor needs to have the skills to motivate others to want to get things done and do a good job. These tips and tricks will help the leaders of your organization motivate employees.

Building a High Performance Culture

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D | Corporate Learning Institute

Many leaders spend a lot of time talking about organizational culture. What does it take to create the right kind of culture? How is the culture maintained?

There's an old joke about an organizational leader who attended a presentation on managing change and organizational culture. He heard about a successful culture in another organization, then told his Human Resources Director to get him "one of those things".

It sounds ludicrous, but like most jokes the story is based in truth. Most people struggle with culture because it's so difficult to define. Even less tangible than a "soft" concept, culture is more like a cloud. You know it's there, but it's nearly impossible to grasp.

Leaders influence the development of culture in several ways, and, by doing so, shape how others perceive their organization. Whether you are a board member, leader, manager, or individual contributor, here are three steps you can take to influence the culture of your organization.

1. **Convey your vision of a winning culture.** If you want to be more than just the caretaker of an existing culture, then you need to define your aspirations. Form a small coalition of stakeholders to create the specific cultural behaviors and expectations for your organization. Create a strategy to communicate, train, and cascade the new expectations throughout your organization.
2. **Demonstrate how new cultural behaviors can advance the organization.** Nothing reinforces new behavior like success. Once you define behaviors and expectations, work with your team to apply them and achieve the small but significant gains needed to gain momentum. Send these stories of success throughout your organization to reinforce the new behaviors.
3. **Stories.** Organizational stories exemplify organizational success and capture the exploits of employees who personify these values in action. Stories allow employees to learn about what is expected of them and better understand what the business stands for.

Hold Your Best Meeting Yet

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D | Corporate Learning Institute

Here are some great tips to use to prepare for your best meeting or presentation ever:

- "Care to prepare"- use anxiety to drive preparation. Once at your meeting, drop your anxiety levels by telling the group that you will keep the meeting moving ahead, relying on eye contact with positive people, walking through the agenda steps and using a "parking lot" for longer conversations, telling a great story to set the meeting tone, or checking in with each person on how they are doing.
- If you are on time to the meeting, you are late: Schedule to arrive at the meeting 5 minutes before the scheduled start time. This will allow time to check in, settle down, and begin on time.
- Always have an agenda: An agenda is the blue print of the meeting. It allows the meeting holder to plan and defines the purpose and outcomes of the meeting. It also allows the attendees to come prepared for the meeting. Send out the agenda one week before meeting and ask for feedback. If you receive feedback, make the changes and send out one final time.

Tips to use during your meeting:

Here are some great tips to use during your best meeting:

- Assign a timekeeper or assure the group that you will keep time: keep the participants on track and on time. If the group is getting off topic, this individual will interrupt with a 1-minute wrap up warning.
- Use a **parking lot** or an *issue bin*: A parking lot is a sheet of flip chart paper that is taped to the wall. When an issue or topic is not getting the results or outcome you need quickly enough, the participants can choose to put it on the parking lot. The parking lot lists the issue at hand, who needs to be involved, when it can begin, and what the ideal outcome is.
- An issue bin is similar, using a sheet of scratch paper, when an issue is not being resolved and it is not the main purpose of the meeting, the issue is written on a sheet of paper along with who needs to be involved in solving the issue, timeline, and what the ideal outcome is.

- Review the agenda with the group, and clarify the purpose and desired outcomes of the meeting with the group.
- Each individual should participate in the meeting, offer thoughts, advice, suggestions, and ask questions.
- Listen as much as you speak. Engage and challenge other people to discuss. Use phrases such as “Joe, what are your thoughts on this”.

Tips to use during the meeting wrap-up:

Here are some great tips to use during your meeting conclusion:

- Give time for wrap up. Allow participants to give their final thoughts on the meeting.
- Debrief meeting: Allow participants to share their thoughts on the meeting and what they got out of it and what they feel needs to improve for next time, as well as reviewing unfinished business.
- Go over the action steps that need to be done before meeting again. Review who will be taking responsibility- use an action plan, if necessary.
- Review the parking lot and issue bin. Do these items need to be addressed before the next meeting?
- Schedule the next meeting while everyone is still in the room.

Use Steve Job's Tips for making better presentations and meetings:

<http://www.forbes.com/sites/carminnegallo/2012/10/04/11-presentation-lessons-you-can-still-learn-from-steve-jobs/2/>.



Project Management

Managing a project team is an important task that takes skill and effort. A project manager needs to know the strengths and weaknesses of each team member and build trust within the group. These tips and tricks will have you managing your next project team with ease.

A Simple Way to Build Trust in Project Teams

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D | Corporate Learning Institute

Next time you kick off a team project, pause to help team members introduce themselves and get to know each other better. Prior to the meeting, ask each person to bring an “artifact” from home that represents an outside interest or accomplishment.

In the meeting room, write the following down on a flip chart:

- Your name
- Your contact information
- What you do
- Your capabilities and skills
- Something about the project
- Your artifact and outside interests

Deepening the communication between people will let them feel more comfortable later when they need to work through issues on the project. Let each person walk through the introductions and keep a list of each person's responses. Consider compiling the more useful information into a list to send the group to keep as they move forward together.

Effective Delegation

Dr. Susan Cain, Ed. D & Taylor Viering | Corporate Learning Institute

Good leaders, managers, and supervisors know that followers need a clear picture of their expectations. Great leaders help their followers gain clarity in understanding the big-picture from understanding the goal to role clarification and beyond.

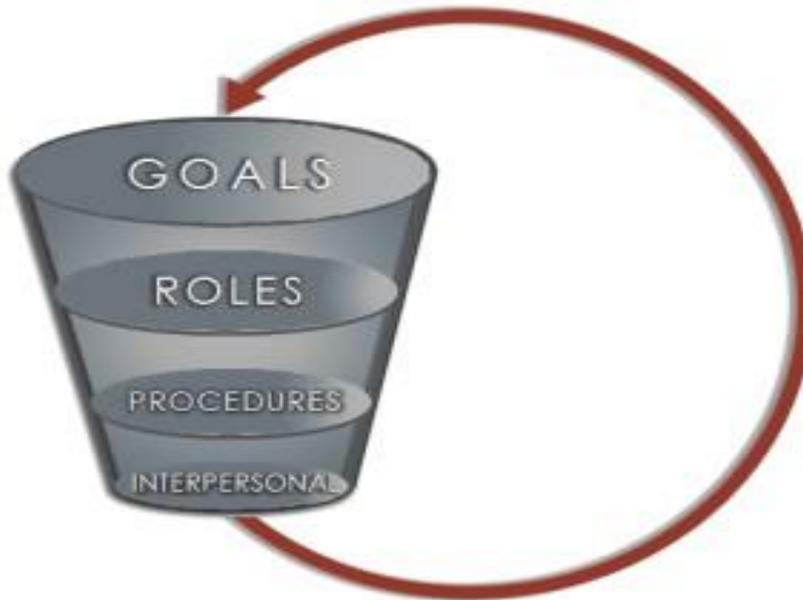
Great leaders also ensure that followers “teach back” what they think they have heard about a project. “Teach back” is simply asking the follower to echo the expectations given by a leader. By providing clear procedures and processes to accomplish work, great leaders are able to delegate with more assurance that project details will be managed.

If all of these key functions are in place, there is a good chance that the interpersonal relationship between leader and follower will be one of mutual trust; these are the foundational conditions for trust to form. With mutual trust, delegation becomes more possible, and two-way communication improves leaders' ability to let go of control and transfer responsibility to the follower.

Use the GRPI Model on the next page to ensure your organization has all the information it needs to accomplish its best work.

The GRPI Model

The GRPI model allows project leaders to ensure that they communicate each level of a project.



Goals – *What exactly a follower is being asked to accomplish.*

Roles – *What exactly the follower is supposed to do to accomplish the goal.*

Procedures – *The “how” and the “what” must specifically be done to accomplish the goal.*

Interpersonal – *What behaviors are expected to be exhibited as the follower accomplishes the goal.*

Use these tools to help delegation:

Delegation Discussion Sheet: <http://slidesha.re/lhf8o5>

Discussion Worksheet: <http://slidesha.re/1boeSzZ>

How to be Directive: <http://slidesha.re/1bojqqe>

This version of the GRPI is adapted from the original 1988 work of Brimm, Charan, Lake, Takeuchi, and Tichy.

Note of Thanks

Thank you for taking the time to read our free sampling of Two-Minute Reads. We hope they've helped you learn, relearn, or polish some skill sets. If you would like more Two-Minute Reads and helpful resources, visit our website at www.corplearning.com.