

ASK THE EXPERTS

MAY 2024

MINDSET AND MENTAL HEALTH

My team is working on a complex client proposal, but my suggestions are consistently overlooked due to more vocal team members dominating the discussions. I hate confrontation and conflict, but I must say something before exploding! How do I speak up comfortably, preserve goodwill, and be heard?

First, you might not be the only one on your team who feels this way. When a few team members or leaders dominate the conversation, it can discourage others from speaking up and confronting problems (Alvarez, 2022). Unheard team members face decreased motivation, stress, and isolation, leading to eroded trust and increased conflict within teams. This negatively impacts productivity, decision-making, and turnover rates, damaging organizational reputation.

Embracing healthy conflict, rather than avoiding it, can significantly benefit team performance, innovation, and overall effectiveness. (Two Rivers Marketing, 2024). So, how can you safely and productively initiate a conversation about feeling more included, without causing hurt feelings? Follow these steps:

Prepare Your Points

- Reflect on specific instances when you felt your expertise was overlooked. Prepare to articulate your feelings and observations without placing blame.
- Identify clear examples of how your contributions could benefit the team or project, including any missed opportunities for improvement.

Request a Meeting

- Approach the team leader or a relevant team member to request a private meeting. Frame it to discuss how you can contribute more effectively to the team.

Express Your Feelings and Observations

- Start the conversation by expressing your commitment to the team and the project's success. Use "I" statements to communicate your feelings and observations, such as "I feel like I have insights that could contribute to our project's success, but I find it challenging to get my points across during our meetings."

Share Specific Examples

- Share the examples you prepared, highlighting instances where your expertise could have made a difference. Be specific about the situations and the potential impact of your contributions.

Propose Solutions

- Suggest practical solutions or changes that could help you contribute more effectively. This could include structured meeting formats, specific roles or tasks that leverage your expertise, or mentorship opportunities where you could share your knowledge with the team.
- Recommend a round-robin feedback method to ensure everyone's input is considered, fostering a more inclusive and collaborative team environment.

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Listen and Engage in Dialogue

- Be open to feedback from your team leader or colleagues. They may offer insights into the situation that you hadn't considered or suggest alternative ways to involve your expertise.

Agree on Actionable Steps

- Work together on actionable steps that can be taken to ensure your contributions are valued and utilized. This might include meeting structure changes, communication channels, or project roles.

Follow Up

- After the meeting, send a thank-you note expressing your appreciation for the discussion and reiterating the agreed-upon steps. Follow up as necessary to ensure the changes are implemented, and offer feedback.

Stay Engaged and Proactive

- Continue to look for opportunities to demonstrate your expertise and contribute to the team. Offer help, propose ideas, and stay engaged with team activities.

Evaluate Progress

- After some time has passed, evaluate whether the situation has improved. Consider whether further conversations are needed or if additional adjustments are necessary.

Approaching the conversation with a mindset geared toward finding solutions and improving team collaboration is key. It's about expressing your needs while being open to understanding the team's dynamics and working together to create a more inclusive environment.

RESOURCES

Alvarez, E. (2022, September 13). The Five Dysfunctions of a Team - Dysfunction #2 "Fear of Conflict."

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[Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When Stakes Are High, Third Edition](#): Grenny, Joseph, Patterson, Kerry, McMillan, Ron, Switzler, Al, Gregory, Emily

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