Make Decisions Based on Facts, Not Generalities

Description

A learning that has proved so helpful to me is to â??pause to learn more.â?• What do I mean? There is great value in pausing and taking time to learn more prior to taking action. Iâ??ve found that taking time to ask a few questions and do some digging usually proves very helpful. Some may relate this to a form of appreciative inquiry. There can be words people use that can be misleading if taken as fact when they may not be. This does not mean a statement is wrong. It means taking time to fact-check or dig deeper prior to reaching a conclusion. The research can also let one know to what degree the statement is accurate.

One example is when the phrase *a lot* is used to describe a situation. *I am hearing from a lot of people. This happens a lot. A lot of people are reading it.* How many is â??a lotâ?•? My experience is that it can mean a few people to thousands of people. Knowing the number impacts how to respond to the statement. I have found that the person saying â??a lotâ?• may feel a certain way and believe that many others feel the same way. When someone says or writes â??a lotâ?• to me, I ask them to clarify how many. For example, â??A lot of people are upset.â?• I find a good response is, â??I want to be helpful. Whom have you heard from?â?• It could just be my experience, and I am an outlier; however, I have found â??a lotâ?• can many times turn out to mean *not* a lot. Itâ??s important to know, because otherwise we may act based on a perception that is not accurate.

There are also those statements that contain the words *everyone, everybody, the entire,* etc. When I was president of Baptist Hospital in Pensacola, Florida, a person who worked there said to me, â??Everyone is upset.â?• I knew that was not totally accurate, for my experience was there had never been a time when everyone felt the same way. I asked, â??Gee, whom have you spoken to whoâ??s upset?â?• The person then shared a unit they had been on. In other words, we went from â??everyoneâ?• to one unit at this time on this day.

Media seems to use broad terms also. I was watching the news, and a report came out that people in a certain area were upset with a change. As I watched the story, one person was interviewed who used the words, â??A lot of folks were not happy.â?• As I listened, I wondered how many people were actually questioned. I would prefer to hear, â??We talked to 20 people in the neighborhood, and 14 felt the change was not going to help the situation.â?•

It is likely the fact that I work in the medical field that taking time to get a diagnosis right is so important to me. The more precise the diagnosis, the more precise the treatment can be.

From about 2005 to 2009, I was involved in a project called Community Maritime Park in Pensacola. At that time, I had never been involved in a community project. It became a contentious situation. A weekly afternoon radio host was against the project. There were letters to the editor in the newspaper saying that I was a carpetbagger, that I was destroying the city, that I was pitting family member against family member. I was dividing the community. I received anonymous letters to my home telling me to leave town. Based on these incidents, one would think there was little support for the project, and I was the most hated person in the city.

Luckily, we took time to research community opinion via professional polling. We found out that more people were for the project than against it. One question still brings a smile. Even with all the media attention, referendum signature collecting, and page after page of letters to the editor in the local paper, when asked what they thought of me, 23 percent of those surveyed did not even know who I was. Itâ??s not that those statements or letters should be ignored. My message is about taking the time to learn more before coming to conclusions.

A common statement can be, â??We are short-staffed.â?• This may be true. Still, when we take time to know the facts, it can change how we view the situation. Is the area short-staffed based on the staffing schedule? For example, at times there can be an unexpected surge of people wanting and/or needing service. Is it a situational staffing issue or a consistent staffing issue? A smaller department in an organization where I was working had two employees whose family members passed away unexpectedly, and another one who went into labor much sooner than expected. Three people out of a small area is a tough situation. It was difficult for a while.

Another time I was in an organization, and 94 percent of the shifts were fully staffed. This of course meant 6 percent of the time they were not. Yet it was not unusual to hear the statement, â??We are always under-staffed.â?• Statements like this can mean the number of staff needed are not present, but experience level also has an impact on perception. With the Pensacola Blue Wahoos baseball team, we find that if there are three very experienced people working in the ticketing area, it may be better staffing than having four people if two of them are new. The two experienced ones are taking care of their own lines and helping others.

In summary, here are two tips:

- Be attentive to words and phrases like *a lot, everyone, the community, elected officials love to,* and so forth. Before accepting them and making a decision, pause to evaluate the situation. An organization had a recognition system. At a department leader meeting, the shared feeling of the group was that the recognition program needed to be changed. The decision was made to survey the employees before acting. It turned out that 90 percent of the employees liked the program and felt it was working well, 4 percent said get rid of it, and 6 percent said keep it but be more consistent. Donâ??t be shy in asking people to share how they concluded that â??a lot of peopleâ?• or â??everyoneâ?• feel a certain way.
- Take time to measure when you can. My experience is a small number of individuals who have loud voices and speak in generalities can make it appear they represent more people than they do. A city conducted a Quality of Life survey using a well-respected company. I was at the city council meeting in which the results were shared. They showed that overall, about 70 percent of

> the residents had positive feelings about the city leadership. After the presentation, a citizen spoke and stated that â??no oneâ?• liked living in the city. This person had every right to state how they felt; however, the fact that the city had the data that showed otherwise changed the conversation. Facts are helpful. The mayor of Pensacola, D.C. Reeves, uses the term â??fact-based decision-making.â?•

I hope you find the above information helpful. Thank you for your support of my writings. I am grateful I get to do this every week.

Date Created
February 6, 2023
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