

Hello, everyone. This is Wayne Rivers at FBI, where *We Build Better Contractors*.

This week, I want to talk about how leaders can escape their echo chambers. Two housekeeping things. You've heard me talk about this next Boot Camp, February 9 and 10, '23. Get your folks signed up. If you know anyone who would be a great consultant, we are hiring. So let us know who that might be, and we will certainly get in touch with them.

This week, my inspiration comes from a Harvard Business Review article by Dina Smith in July of '22. She says, "The higher leaders go, the more likely they are to find themselves in an echo chamber, surrounded by people who think like them and agree with them."

I think that probably tends to be true. The traditional employee, the org chart, traditionally, org chart looks like a pyramid with the CEO at the top, and the old saying is it's lonely at the top. I think that's probably true. So, she talks about three examples of leaders stifling open communications in their organizations. The first person was somebody who used the Socratic method to a degree that it was exhausting to bring ideas, because, oh, gosh, it just ... He would work you so hard to flesh out the idea that people became discouraged from taking new concepts or new thoughts to him.

The second person was a super-fast-paced executive, and people thought that they were wasting his time. In fact, he gave off signals, looking at his watch and things like that, that people were wasting his time when they were delivering information. The third one was the kind of executive that says, "Yes, but ... However, have you thought of this? Well, actually that won't work, because ..." so killing ... It's like strangling these ideas in the crib before they have a chance even to see the light of day.

I remember one of our members calling, and he had a problem in one of his offices. Because the leader in that office was one of the types that didn't like bad news, so it was kind of a kill the messenger kind of thing. If you came to him, "My project is really behind on schedule. I'm afraid we've got ... we're going to have this problem," shoot the messenger kind of leadership doesn't work. And so, problems fail to come up in that particular office where they could be addressed early, and so our member had to make a change to get the kind of leadership in place where they could address problems early. As Dennis says, they could run to their problems with leadership rather than having leadership kick the problems out the back door.

So, what about this is important to you? Well, none of us want to be in an echo chamber. We all want to be enlightened and great leaders, so six tips for being a better leader in the sense that you're not in an echo chamber. Walk the talk. You've got to show that your actions ... Your employees recognize your actions are louder than your words. So, model the behaviors that you want to see. If you want your people to have open and honest communication, you've got to exhibit that you're willing to participate in open and blunt conversation, too.

The second thing is continuously solicit ideas and feedback. You can go to your people and say, "We all have blind spots, me included. I have a bunch of them. I want you to help me with mine. I'll help you with yours. Let's be open. If I'm on base, I want you to ... If I'm off base, I want you to say so. Same thing. I'll do that courtesy for you. Feedback is a gift." Right?

The third thing, demonstrate curiosity, and then listen. Be emotionally intelligent. There was a famous thing. I think it was George Bush, President 41. He was in a presidential debate on television, and he looked at his watch as if, "I don't want to be here. I'm not comfortable here. I'm impatient." That was a big thing, and I don't know if it cost him the election or not. But it was a big thing. It was in all the papers, which we used to read back then. So, listen actively, and ask questions. "Oh. Hmm. Tell me more about that. Can you elaborate on that a little bit? Take this a little farther." Just encourage your people to think through ideas and new information.

Number four, speak last. You know what's in your own mind. You know what's in your own heart. Let's find out what's in the minds and hearts of these other people. You don't have to jump into a discussion and kill it, or flesh it out, or say, "Yeah. We're going to do this." Speak last. Kind of let the conversations develop around you. What do other people think and feel?

The fifth thing is solicit other opinions. In some organizations, they even appoint a devil's advocate, where you have to dissent from the conventional wisdom or the prevailing attitude of other people in the room. For us, it's always been me and Dennis. We've never agreed. You've heard me say we've never agreed. So, who's your Dennis? Find your Dennis. If you have to, appoint your Dennis or maybe two or three people that your ... Make them your Dennis committee.

Then, the sixth thing, Dina Smith didn't write about this, but it works for me. I know it works for so many of you, too. Join a peer group. Golly Moses. Leon Danco wrote, in the 1970s, "You need to surround yourself with risk-taking peers." What did he mean? Your lawyer works for you. Your CPA works for you. Your banker works for you. Your COO, your CFO, they all work for you. So, at some point, they're limited in what they can say and do, because they want to continue to work for you. None of them want to risk their job or their business alliance with you.

So, you need to be surrounded by risk-taking peers, and I don't care whether it's your local Vistage chapter or whatever it happens to be. Find peers that you can be open and honest and vulnerable with. Give them feedback. Let them give you feedback. I'm telling you, iron sharpens iron, and it works. Find a peer group and join it. So, what works for you? How do you ensure that you're not in an echo chamber, and you're getting the kind of diversity of thinking and ideas that you need to be successful in construction? This is Wayne Rivers at FBI, and *We Build Better Contractors*.