

SYNTAX Newsletter #39: October - December 2004

In This Issue...

- [Quick Quiz](#)
- [Being a Leader in the New Workplace](#)
- [From the Observation Deck: Which Side Are You On?](#)
- [What IS Syntax? What does it have to do with organizational change?](#)
- [Calendar and News: Next Syntax course at SJSU, etc.](#)

Quick Leadership Quiz

- 1. What three questions set up teams for success?**
- 2. Where should you meet people before you lead them anywhere?**
- 3. Instead of why, gather information using _____ or _____.**
- 4. In a learning organization, your culture remembers to turn blame into _____.**
- 5. Which part of a request is most often omitted?**

(go to last page for answers)

Being a Leader in the New Workplace

The time that has come presents new and difficult tests of our ability to evolve as a collaborative society. Concerns about security, health, and prosperity call for collaboration just when our reptilian brains want to fight back, flee, or freeze.

This time also presents us with remarkable creativity, advances in communication technology, capacities to find and share information at amazing speeds, and a growing consciousness of our delicate interdependence on the planet.

As people who work with and in organizations, we want to make our organizations more successful, more humane, more sustainable. As citizens, family members, and human beings, we want to live in peace, freedom, and well-being.

We know it's up to us to connect the resources and creativity to solve the problems and reduce the threats. Whether working as consultant or coach, or employed in an organization, we may not see how we can affect distressing policies about compensation, or pollution, or outsourcing. We may not know how to end hunger or war. We may feel helpless or hopeless at times, losing touch with our sense of power.

What we can do is to enhance our collaborative connections to the people around us. We can keep ourselves informed and engaged in dialogue rather than withdrawing. We can involve ourselves with groups committed to positive change.

In our daily lives, we can focus on the basic task of learning to cooperate in our relationships, workgroups, and communities. What's right next to us matters, as well as what's happening around the globe.

We are being leaders when we

- conserve resources
- listen fully and open-mindedly
- find out what the other person's purpose is, and telling them ours
- inquire into the effects of business decisions on people and the environment, bringing attention to unintended consequences
- are authentic and invite others to be authentic by example
- are accountable for agreements that we make
- get involved in groups dealing with social justice, sustainability, innovative thinking
- open ourselves anew to feedback from our colleagues and friends
- work on the biggest transformation, that of accepting ourselves as we are.

None of the above is easy, especially if we feel threatened. These actions take courage. Even if we don't succeed at this every single day, we can get ourselves centered, and renew our intentions. We're really not alone. Speak up in support of others and ask for support, whether you think you need it or not. It may not be our traditional image of leadership. That image is ready for more than just a facelift.

Take stock of what matters to you and let yourself be inspired. The time that has come calls on us as leaders to 'be the changes we want to see.'

From the Observation Deck: Which Side Are You On?

Would you rather negotiate with a vendor or customer who was known for withholding information, trying to control the conversation, and wanting to push your price as low as they can; or with someone who was known for being open and informed, flexible in the conversation, and believing that a fair price would serve them as well as you in the long run?

It's hard to argue for the win-lose approach when it's presented from the other person's point of view. Nonetheless, it still holds sway in business cultures. In the world of selling, for example, we win - you lose is the prevailing way of thinking and speaking. It's the unspoken code in many businesses and agencies.

Even if we want to work collaboratively, tough times seem to justify responding as adversaries. "Sidedness" - for and against, right and wrong, us and them - are mental devices that lock us into positions that we often don't even believe, and that usually don't serve us.

The tendency to fall into zero-sum thinking is not an individual one. It's part of the water we human fish swim in, reinforced by language that assumes opposition as the natural state. Even people who are trained in Neurolinguistics, Win-Win Negotiation, Transactional Analysis, or other collaborative learning models, can be seduced by the common-sense thinking of battlefield metaphors. Conscious attention is required to re-focus an apparent conflict into an opportunity to collaborate.

If we don't think we have to fight, we can observe more of what's going on. We can let our partners know what we want to accomplish and find out how we can combine forces to increase both of our successes. What's so radical about that?

Current international conflicts have strengthened the accepted rationale of having to fight back. We hear justifications of aggressive and abusive behavior as if it will eventually lead to safety or security. Global fear and anger can seep into everyday responses to people around us.

With visions of international harmony seeming to come apart, it is especially important to be aware of our own assumptions and the resulting communication patterns.

I used to know someone whose responses to anything usually started with 'no' even if she wasn't disagreeing. Perhaps it seemed to give her room to have her own opinion. This habit always gave the other person a little push away. The other person's response could easily reinforce my friend's thinking that she needed to make more space for her own opinion, by saying, 'no' again. And so on.

The patterns that reflect our most habitual beliefs are extremely successful at reinforcing themselves. It takes willingness to notice them and periods of time when you really listen to exactly what you say.

Experiment with changing a common verbal pattern. Instead of 'but' in writing and speech, use 'and' or simply end a sentence and start the next one without either 'but' or 'and'. The little shift of 'but' to 'and' in your conversations will at least shake up some of the automatic opposition-speak.

Everyday business transactions are fraught with assumptions that we are fighting one another even when company values say we believe in partnership. Recently I decided to shift investments from one firm to another. The representative of the firm I was leaving told me that he was unable to liquidate a particular fund.

The new advisor thought that for some reason he was just being difficult, and suggested that I put my request more forcefully by faxing him a letter. When I told her that I would do so, and

would first telephone him to say that the intent of the fax was to strengthen his hand for handling this matter, she gave a little laugh. It may have sounded odd that I wanted to help him give me the result I wanted, rather than demanding that he do so.

Maintaining a collaborative attitude doesn't mean accepting poor service. It means that I assume that the other person is acting in good faith. I don't think it would expedite the transaction to attack.

Being right and showing that the other person is wrong may ease frustration for some people. For me, confrontation is easier in the assumed context of collaboration.

Still, I need to wake up to my own adversarial thinking often enough. The times I get stuck and know I'm out of balance are marked by feeling opposition to others, lacking alignment, and not trusting that they will support my interests. Maybe they won't. My acting that way makes it more likely, and I will have less enjoyment in the process.

In our book *Smart Work*, one of the Nine Guidelines for the New Workplace is to manage your boundaries. We can't choose how others behave. We can choose what we do.

We can act 'as if' there's enough to go around and more, even if we can't prove it until we try.

If we're going to take sides, shall we do so within a traditional way of thinking, fighting for our share of finite resources, or can we choose to respond in such a way that we collaborate to find out how we can generate the resources we need?

When it comes to sidedness, which side are you on?

What IS Syntax?

What does it have to do with organizational change?

Syntax is defined as 'structure.' Most of us are familiar with syntax in the context of language and computer code. The correct sequence of words, or words and symbols, is important if you want to construct something that works and makes sense.

The syntax of behavior goes beyond spoken language. Our behavior, i.e. what we do and how we do it, has a structure that is directly aligned with our identities, beliefs, and capabilities.

When people in organizations undertake to change systems, processes, and cultures, they need to think about changes in the personal syntax of the members.

Let's say you want to increase accountability. Accountability comes down to the ability to make good requests and the ability to depend on the commitments that are made. If the culture is one of indirect requests, compliance, and avoidance of feedback, accountability won't increase. Good organizational development offers guidance in the form of information, learning processes, and systems design to help people enact the syntax that will work in the new context. If it doesn't, the inertia of the old culture will prevail. Syntax offers a structure for effectiveness, a crucial element to include in planning for change.

Calendar and News Syntax Course at San Jose State

Strengthen your leadership skills, refresh your communication style, network with other successful professionals, and earn credit toward a Business Management certificate.

Breakthroughs in Collaborative Leadership, led by Lucy Freedman. Four Monday evenings from October 25 through November 22, 2004. Sponsored by the Center for Professional Development at SJ State University. The campus is conveniently located in north San Jose. Go to www.profdev.sjsu.edu, in Business Management.

FREE FREE FREE Syntax Grads can get extra copies of the reminder cards to adorn your workspace or share with others. Email syntax@syntx.com with snail mail address, the number you would like, and for whom.

Healthy Organizations is the subject of workshops, talks, and a paper by Lucy Freedman. The next workshop will be held in Mexico City, in English and Spanish, November 13, 2004. The paper will be published in 2005 in the *Transactional Analysis Journal* issue on Breakthrough

Interventions in Organizations.

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Leadership Quiz Answers

1. Three goal (or outcome) questions get teams aligned.

They are:

What do we want?
What will that get us?
How will we know when we get there?

2. Before leading, meet people where they are.

3. “How” and “What” questions are good for gathering information. Compare the quality of information that results if you use these questions instead of automatically asking “Why?”

4. Aim. The transformation of challenges into effective actions marks a healthy culture.

5. People most often forget to specify the time: By when do you need it done?

Five right, you're syntactite.

Learned something new?
Then you are one too.

The information on which the quiz is based can be found in *Smart Work: The Syntax Guide for Mutual Understanding in the Workplace* by Lisa Marshall and Lucy Freedman (Kendall-Hunt, 1995).