

Directional Dialog

An Effective Way to Communicate and Handle Change

What is Directional Dialog?

Directional Dialog is conversation designed to change the course of action when the stakes may become critical and emotions are involved. It is the changing of action that is pleasing to us or how to get things done in a more constructive way.

“Constructive talk that brings different issues to the surface and invites creative ideas”.

Charles Swindoll

The goal is to make people feel better. It is not “Us vs. Them” attitude.

Objectives

- Formalize impressions by putting them into complete sentences
- Demonstrate how to change “but” statements into “and” statements
- Demonstrate thinking and test reactions.

Goals

- Break down negative communication barriers
- Influence positive behavior change
- Create buy-in for your ideas
- Promote team-work and enthusiasm

In working with people, I like to get a beach ball that has many different colors on it, white, red, blue, yellow, orange, and green. I have a list of different types of people your leaders or yourself may be dealing with on policies, change, goals, implementation of new ideas, etc.

White—Neutral people, goes along with whatever, doesn’t speak up or really care.

Red—Emotional people, one that expresses or demonstrates emotions either verbally or with gestures.

Blue—Laid back, arms folded, feet on the desk, nothing really bothers them.

Green—Optimistic people, see the glass half full, “we can do it spirit”, etc.

Yellow—Negative people, “This cannot work”, “We have done this before”, etc.

Orange—Apathetic people, “I don’t care, I will continue doing things my way”, uncooperative/team concepts, etc.

Understanding the characteristics and nature of people, one must consider who and why they may be doing or saying things, understand that some people may not serve in certain roles. I like to get the beach ball out to show my team the different colors and different people they may come in contact with in their department or committee.

Taking Notice: Collect and Reflect

When you decide it is time to address an issue, take time to observe and think about what is happening before you rush in with big ideas and lots of verbal directions. It is so easy to fall into the pit of something without using much wisdom. Step back, reflect, observe, and formalize your impressions by putting them into complete sentences.

Examples:

If we talk about what all is not working in our church and our goal is in need of change, some people may say, "Just tell me what to do and I will do it." Some will say, "Why?" The "why" question often puts people on the defensive no matter which direction from which "why" is coming. (diversion, defiance, coping, etc.) When addressing a change, you might say, "I have noticed from the short time I have been here of how you have responded differently with change or goals or I have noticed that many changes do not seem to work." This may be rephrasing the need for change.

Another way of saying that to avoid the "why" is to state, "We need to discuss why the process was not effective. What are your thoughts and ideas as how to fix it or think through a solution differently?" We need to take away any defensiveness or the pointing of fingers. It was the process that may have not been successful, not the person. When we rephrase things in a more positive way, it engages people to discuss and discover other ways to accomplish our goals.

When it comes to change, people for the most part, are resistant to any form of change usually due to the way it is presented. Change can bring a form of **panic**, bringing out the question of "why" do we need to change, "we have been doing it this way for years-type of mentality", and, in reality, it may be hard for some people to actually make decisions.

Others may have difficulty in submitting to authority. They may resist by going to a safe place by either hiding with silence or hiding by asking so many questions which seems to divert any responsibility on their part.

Example:

Go back to your 3rd grade class. Some students were introverts by remaining in their seats, doing their schoolwork so they would not be noticed or gotten onto, while others were more extroverts by getting out of their seats, talking to others or with their teacher. How

did the teachers respond to each one of these? The ones who remained in their seats were rewarded by being “good” kids while the other ones were labeled as “troubled” kids having ADHD or not very disciplined when in fact, both had different personalities and qualities that later on in life become great assets.

The first group may have become great accountants, office personnel, assembly line workers, etc. while the later ones could perform well in public settings, sales, and management areas. Both contribute to the society and church, but you cannot force or expect them to do things with which they are **not equipped!** But so often, we look at people and wonder why one cannot perform as well as others. The answer may be as simple as to say they are not equipped for what you are expecting them to do.

In working with people, we must treat everyone with dignity and respect. Why not ask, “What areas of help or work do you believe you are good at?” Get some feedback and use their strengths. The goal is to make people feel better and to work together!!! Again, it is not about “**Us vs. Them**” or leader vs. staff type of approach.

So often we have 2 reds, 2 yellows, 2 greens, 2 oranges, 2 whites, and 2 blues on our team or department. It can be a little frustrating because church people should be cooperative and positive thinkers but in truth are not. It is important for us to communicate and observe this type of mix, communicate clearly, direct and make statements in a form of asking, etc. to gain different results or in a more positive way.

Ask, “What do you need?” “What can I do differently?” “What would you like to see happen in our church?” Again, the answering of “Why?” can be challenging but we can respond in different ways for different reasons. Remember...***We all do not speak the same language.***

We must also have our “radar” on, observing how others react and what they do when we are trying to lead them. Some things to observe are:

- Watch faces and hands
- Listen for changes in tone and inflection
- Pay attention to who speaks up and who hangs back
- Watch for engagement or disconnect

No one wants to be the odd man out. We all need to feel secure, safe and valuable to any team. Some people have never been able to work as a team and need help in defining what a team should look like and what is the concept of unity.

We as leaders can provide this by active listening, reforming our statements, creating an environment where people can thrive, and provide effective communication. I often have heard people say there is “no communication in our church” but when looking a little closer, I often find that others want people to approach or communicate with them but they do

very little, if any, to communicate or approach others. Communication should never be an excuse and is always a two-way street.

Humor can also deflect or defuse certain situations. It allows others to look back, take a deep breath, gain a more balanced perspective, and then give it a go. Humor gives permission to be vulnerable with dignity. *Charles Swindoll*

Note:

- Note what you hear and see
- Put into words what you think
- Write down in complete sentences
- Use sentences to formulate the beginning of the conversation

Want:

- How should I behave if I really want this?
 1. I would find myself—get in touch with my inner values regarding the role I occupy in the church.
 2. I would know myself—remember how I react physically and emotionally can change or cause harm to any situation.
 3. I would offer support for others to do the same.
 4. If my emotions are triggered, I will show a Christ-like love and leadership that is strong and resilient where change can safely take place.
- What would I say, do...talk slower, safely, etc.?
 1. I would practice being in control of my emotions and observing myself.
 2. I would practice active listening.
 3. I would model directional dialog by inviting others to offer ideas and feeling. You can take a deep breath and instead of standing or lecturing, take a seat, cross your legs, lean forward, and notice people looking at you more. Why do I have a sofa in my office? To make people more relaxed and bring a distance in between us and not looking behind a desk.
- Have I asked others what they want?
 1. Have I reacted with respect?
 2. Have I offered opportunity to others?
 3. Have I been mindful of the emotions of others?
- Have I listened to what others say?
- How can we work together?
 1. We will work together to preserve respect.
 2. We will honor each individual.

In determining what we want, it is much better to say something like this, “I know we want to be the very best group ever, best women’s group, the best youth group, etc.” or we can say, “What do you want to personally gain from being in this group?” **Be Simple & Clear.** “What can we add or eliminate to make this process effective to achieve its goal? What can I do?”

“I would like to hear your thoughts (new ideas).” “Did I communicate well enough or do I need to try a different approach?” In the past, leaders often state, “I gave the directions but am I the only one who is trying to do this differently?” Sounds as if we need to try a different approach.

Again, it is trying to gain a different approach to reach our goals in a win-win manner. Instead of placing a dress code on people, we could ask, “What would you think is the appropriate dress for _____?” “How can others feel welcome in our church?” Or perhaps asking if they can remember coming into a new church for the first time? “What made them want to stay?”

Our ultimate goal may be to have people refocus on, “What are we supposed to be doing here?”, instead of focusing on our department, presentation, etc. **We may be actually doing things for the wrong reasons.** The goal is getting others to see the ministry and outreach instead of just their departmental or personal needs.

Directional dialog is to help us, as leaders, to think and perhaps act or respond differently in a more effective manner. It is less confrontational and allows others to feel a welcome part of your department and can actually co-manage to gain the results you needed in the first place.

Try this, see how it works. I think as we try to be more creative and less predictable or set in our ways, people will feel the sincerity and unity our church needs to have. It can set you apart from others in your community and create long-lasting results.

Patterson, Kerry; Grenny, Jenny; McMillan, Ron; Switzler, Al. 2002. Crucial Conversations: tools for talking when stakes are high. McGraw-Hill.

Swindoll, Charles. 2012. *Touching Others with Your Words.* Hachette Book Group.

Copyright © 2020 Pastoral Care Inc. All Rights Reserved. All material is intended for individual use only. Any other use, such as distribution, promoting one's ministry or adding to websites, is prohibited unless written permission granted by Pastoral Care Inc.