

Achieving “Get it Done”

Healthy Assertion—The Describe/Express/Specify (DES) Script

Stephen Covey, who sold 25 Million copies of *Seven Habits of Highly Effective People* and is widely viewed as the most influential business consultant of the 20th Century said, *Seek first to understand, and then to be understood. Seeking first to understand* is covered in more detail in the *First, Do No Harm* article on page 3 of this handout.

If we are having a difficult conversation and things are escalated, it is wise to start the conversation by letting the other person fully tell their side of the story while we *seek first to understand*. Once we have listened well, we have earned the other’s attention and then it is time to choose our words carefully.

The **DES Script** is a simple way to do this. It is a very effective approach to request a change in communication or behavior. It works with subordinates, peers, supervisors and even with teenagers. Here is where the *Script* sits on the *Language Continuum*.

Language Continuum

Acceptable Language: Specific affirmation and praising (*practiced by top mentors & leaders*—see pg 4 of this handout); positive feedback; invited critical feedback; DES Script

Unacceptable Language: Poorly timed or poorly delivered critical feedback; labeling; gossip; hurtful and belittling sarcasm; inappropriate sexual comments; shaming and humiliation; racial slurs; threats

DES Script

1. Describe the behavior, what you see and hear or what was specifically reported to you (*what did the video camera see & hear?*). Avoid judgments, labels, assumptions and generalizations.
2. Express how it affects you (“I” language) or the team you are responsible for (“We” language). Be as transparent as possible.
3. Specify what you need or prefer for things to improve.

Example

1. Describe: “Yesterday you said that you would bring me your section of the report by 8:30 and you brought it in at 11:30...”
2. Express: ...“and I am upset about it because I wasn’t able to put the whole report together as I promised my boss for 10:00...”
3. Specify:...“and it would mean a lot to me if I can count on you to do as you say you are going to do, okay?”

The DES script is worth a try!

Without knowing the force of words, it is impossible to know more. (Confucius)

Strategizing--“Planning Has its Place” ***Art & Science of Feedback—Know Thyself***

These days the Ancient Greek’s Oracle of Delphi message *know thyself* is often found in business books and articles. In the workplace one of the most effective areas to develop *knowing thyself* is in the giving and receiving of feedback. Leaders need to know how well they do this. For example, are they known as someone who *criticizes more than praises* or who *dishes it out but can’t take it*? Extensive research confirms that leaders do not receive feedback unless they ask for it on a regular basis because even senior direct reports are afraid the leader may *kill the messenger*.

Sixty-three percent of executives surveyed in a recent study by *World at Work* say that their biggest challenge to effective performance management is that their managers lack the courage and ability to have difficult feedback conversations. Researcher Brene Brown observes that a lack of meaningful feedback is the number one reason cited by talented people for leaving an organization.

Know Thyself Feedback Tips **Giving**

- Be kind. Remember “May I give you some feedback?” are not easy words to hear.
- “Find the Good and Praise it” in public. Criticize in private. Praise at least three times more than criticize. Don’t praise someone so you can then criticize them.
- Ask for permission to give feedback—confirm time is right for the other person.
- Describe behavior using specific examples (*what did the video camera see and hear?*) and effects on you and others. Include how you personally feel about it.
- Deliver the perfect *dosage* to each person at the right time—check in with the receiver after each point. Everyone has a different level of sensitivity to feedback.
- Identify the results that you hope the feedback will produce.
- Follow up within a few days.

Receiving

- Practice *smart vulnerability* (being open at the right times in the right ways to competent and kind people) so it is easy for associates to speak to you anytime.
- Be honest about whether it is a good time for you to receive feedback and, if not, ask if it can be re-scheduled.
- See feedback at *actual size* and try not to confuse it with feedback you have heard from others in the past.
- Be curious about *blind spots*. Ask for as much detailed information as possible.
- Let the deliverer know how the feedback is affecting you and, if it is too much, that you would prefer a second session to hear the remainder of the feedback.
- Paraphrase what you think you have heard.
- Thank the person and seek specific suggestions for further action.
- If the feedback is re-directing you in some way and you can immediately see the validity of it, make a commitment to change your behavior.
- Follow up within a few days and report on what changes you have made.

Feedback is the breakfast of champions. (Blanchard)

Relating “We’re in this Together” ***“First, Do No Harm”***

Physicians and Organizational Leaders share the harmful habit of poor listening.

Emotional Intelligence expert, Daniel Goleman, says the “The common cold of organizational leadership is poor listening.” Don’t look to physicians to cure this common cold.

A Non Profit working with health care organizations found that communication failure was at the root of over 70% of serious adverse health outcomes and over 75% of physicians interrupt their patients before they have a chance to fully answer the question “How can I help you today?” This leads to misdiagnosis.

Doctors have been working on improving their listening, and over the last three decades have increased the time before they interrupt from 17 to 23 seconds. The *British Medical Journal* ran a test in which patients were allowed to speak until they indicated they were completed; the results showed that patients could express their concerns in two minutes or less, and in most cases, could have voiced all their concerns in only six more seconds if the doctors had given them the chance (29 seconds total). Studies show that in the United States malpractice lawsuits decreased by 50% when a patient was given those extra six seconds.

Organizational leaders are required to be astute diagnosticians and this requires an exceptional ability to listen. Open questions and patience are highly recommended. My parents are both lawyers and I grew up in a culture of closed questions. I remember cutting the lawn and hitting a small piece of construction material which flew out and broke a window at our house. I went inside to tell my parents and they both asked: “Did you or did you not break the window, yes or no?” This came back to haunt me when I was formally training as a mediator; my mentors debriefing me after mediations would challenge me on my ability to ask open questions. “You cornered the disputants with your closed questions—that doesn’t work in conflict de-escalation.”

Reviewing over 1,500 [Exceptional Leader 360 Feedback Tool](#) reports, the two categories “*Listens for the Underlying Unmet Needs*” and “*Addresses Conflict and Resolves or De-Escalates*” almost always show the two lowest scores. As a mediator I know these two are connected. The secret to de-escalating conflict is listening long enough to hear the underlying unmet needs.

Both the physical health and organizational health diagnostician roads start with *deep listening*.

One of the most sincere forms of respect is actually listening to what another has to say. (Bryant McGill)

Inspiring & Tending “I Have a Dream”/ “Find the Good and Praise It” ***Trusting More, Delegating More***

In Paul Zak’s “The Trust Factor” he presents his oxytocin-based neuroscientific research which confirms that employees in high-trust organizations are more productive, have more energy at work, collaborate better with their colleagues, and stay with their employers longer than people working at low-trust companies. They suffer less chronic stress and are happier with their lives. All these factors fuel stronger performance.

In its 2016 global survey, Price Waterhouse Coopers reported that CEOs seem to intuitively know this because 55% of them think that a lack of trust is a threat to their organization’s growth but most admit that they don’t know where to start to improve trust.

Studies show that increasing the trust of one’s direct supervisor by 10% has been valued by the subordinate equally to a pay increase of 36%.

The fastest way to build trust is by “finding the good and praising it.” Neuroscience shows that recognition has the largest effect on trust when it occurs immediately after a goal has been met, when it comes from direct supervisors and peers, and when it’s tangible, unexpected, personal, and public. Public recognition not only uses the power of the crowd to celebrate successes, but also inspires others to aim for excellence. And it gives top performers a forum for sharing best practices, so others can learn from them.

Many leaders see trust as an *on/off switch* (“Joe can’t be trusted but Susan can”) rather than a *dimmer switch* (“I can trust Joe with some things and I can trust Susan with more things”). The problem with this *on/off switch* approach is that good people are *written off*. In fact, after thinking about it, we would probably give Joe the keys to the garage but not the house or let him take care of the dog but not the baby.

We tend to be unaware of what is really eroding the trust we have of another but we do know that we are not comfortable delegating things to them and, unfortunately, we continue to believe *if I want something done right I need to do it myself*. We learn to extend more *smart trust* (trust based on the other’s track record and the difficulty/importance of the task at hand) by increasing our Self Awareness.

To help with Self Awareness, try completing a simple trust assessment (out of 1-10) for your five closest people and come up with one thing you need from them so you can adjust the *trust dimmer switch* one notch higher for each person. “I am going to ask Joe to get his reports in on time or let me know they will be late well before the deadline. I’m going to let him know this is really important to me.”

Don’t write Joe off—he’s a good guy, he just needs more feedback from you (see page 2 of this handout).

Trust is like the air we breathe. When it’s present nobody really notices. But when it’s absent, everybody notices. (Warren Buffett)