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Focus

A publication of Wagner Consulting Group

August 2014

Strategic Conversations: Opening Minds and
Shaping Choices

Recall the last time you were trying to sell a new idea or strategy and met unyielding resistance. Regardless of the compelling logic supporting your plan, doubts and opposition endlessly arose. "Why can't they see this?" you thought.

Most likely, your problem was due to deep seated human loss-aversion instincts that favor the familiar over the new and different. So, instead of fighting this loss-aversion instinct, build on existing experience and lead the audience, whether one or many, to new perspectives. As a simple example, imagine taking a person who had always lived deep within a forest up in a hot air balloon. From altitude, the forest-dweller could see rivers and plains and distant mountains. Just knowing that the world was bigger than they ever imagined would likely spark a burst of creativity, exploration, and progress.

Now, remember this forest-dweller story and think about the "box" in which your organization operates. We endlessly hear exhortations to "think outside the box!" How often does that work? Not often. Imagine the difficulty trying to teach our forest-dweller to behave as if he were in a desert when he'd never seen one? That's analogous to asking office-dwellers to engage in a radically new way of thinking.

So, instead of asking someone to leave their (safe and familiar) box, help them see their box from different perspectives. We didn't ask forest-dweller to change his box, but we did allow him to see it in a radically new way. Same box, new perspective.

Here's a step by step approach for changing the perspective of a management team.

1-Begin with the managers' baseline scenario.

2-Expand their field of vision by using stories and viewing well-known historical events

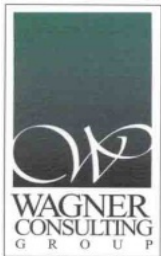
over many years. Just as altitude gives perspective, so also does time when it's compressed.

3-Set up role play exercises where office-dwellers team up and behave like competitors. That way, from a safe place, managers gain different perspectives on an issue and can then visualize new possibilities, previously unimaginable.

4-Then consider different scenarios, alternately zooming in to understand the nuts and bolts issues and then zooming out (balloon up!) to see if the idea is sound or faulty. After few iterations of zooming in and out, the best choices will emerge.

The secret sauce of this approach is gathering the right people in the right setting. Then take folks up in a balloon and the strategic conversation will begin.

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