

The Obvious Conversation

By David Finney

Sometimes people don't say something because it's obvious. Sometimes people get criticised for saying the obvious. But there are three things about the obvious:

1. What's obvious to one may not be obvious to another
2. Looking at the obvious from a different angle can be a very powerful process
3. Sometimes we need reminding of the obvious

For instance, it's obvious that I should spend quality time talking to my family after delivering a communication workshop, but sometimes I need to remind myself of this (and sometimes my wife reminds me). The really big thing about the obvious is how it changes depending on the circumstances. Here are two case studies.

Jack is feeling de-motivated and wishes to find a way of increasing his motivation levels. He is relatively happy in his job and with his home life but for some reason that is currently unknown to him he cannot find a good source of motivation. One 'obvious' solution might be for Jack to start a programme of exercise and meditation. But he does not associate exercise with motivation and has never considered taking up meditation. And so he is presently stuck.

Jill is having problems with someone in her team who reports directly to her who is just not performing up to her expected standards. Bob keeps making mistakes and is a little distant in some team meetings. It is obvious to Jill that she needs to have an in-depth conversation with him about this, but she is a) nervous of his reaction b) concerned that her words will not have much effect and c) a little afraid of her own power of influence.

The situation is causing Jill much stress; her workload is higher (caused by Bob's mistakes and also by the 'unproductive mulling' she has been indulging in ever since this situation arose); her confidence has dipped (exacerbated by Bob's manner in meetings) and she is taking his behaviour personally (as she feels guilty that as his manager she cannot currently motivate him to perform).

The benefits of having this conversation to Jill are obvious and yet she continues to put it off. She tried to talk to him once before but there was little impact. This previous conversation constantly plays on her mind as she felt that she was not firm enough. In this case, the solutions were discovered through coaching which allowed her to come up with an improved structure to difficult conversations and also to create some new approaches to meetings with her team. As for Bob, the quality of his work improved and he started taking an active part in discussions with his manager and also in team meetings.

The Obvious Conversation is the one you need to have but haven't had as yet because you are fearful of where it may lead even though the benefits of having it are obvious. I think "The Obvious" is a very underrated and underused tool. In fact there has been a book written about it by James Dale and a good read at that. Sometimes the right combination of words can provide the trigger to having The Obvious Conversation.

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