"YES, AND..." - BECOMING A BETTER COLLABORATOR

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Have you ever heard an idea and thought to yourself, "What are they talking about? That will never work." If so, you are in good company. Most of us have experienced confusion over someone else's bright idea at some point in the workplace. But consider this: What if they actually had a point? After all, the new idea never works... until it does. How do we get better at opening our minds to the possibility of novel and exciting points of view? Here are a few tips.

"Yes, and..."

One common technique in improv comedy is using the phrase, "yes, and" to move a scene forward. This method calls for the improviser to accept what another improviser has said, and then expound upon the same line of thinking. When explaining the purpose of this method, Max Dickins, a professional improviser, said, "Actor 2 responded [by] listening to the ideas of Actor 1, surrendering the idea he had in his head about what he was going to say next, in order to invest in Actor 1's concept instead."

In the workplace, we often consider it good preparation to have an agenda of items we'd like to bring up in a collaborative setting, and it is good to do this! No one wants to show up to meetings unprepared and underinformed. However, changing our intent from "yes, but" to "yes, and" can provide even more opportunities to co-create ideas. Let's take a closer look at these two simple words.

"The goal of any collaborative experience is to explore the creative process, not hinder it. Transforming the statements to "and" stops us from shutting our colleagues down. "

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"Yes"

The "yes" is where we learn to accept the previous contributor's thoughts. This doesn't necessarily mean we agree with their statement, but it does acknowledge and encourage the validity of their participation. Starting with "yes" also shows you have listened to and understood the other person's idea, which fosters a more positive environment in which innovation can take root.

"And"

Full transparency? This is the hard part. We have a natural disposition to keep this part of the phrase as "but." But it's too expensive, but it's too complicated, but it's too time-consuming... we've got a lot of reasons why that new idea just won't work, and they just might be true.

There is merit to re-framing our objections, though. Transforming the statements to "and" stops us from shutting our colleagues down. Try out statements like, "Yes, that new project would be amazing, and we can brainstorm funding options to see if it's viable this year. Yes, this new program does address a need, and I'd like you to come back with a summary of its features." With statements like these, we haven't committed to or explicitly agreed with a plan of action, but we have expressed support for the voice of others.

The goal of any collaborative experience is to explore the creative process, not hinder it. We can avoid blocking behavior by using "yes, and" to reserve our judgments of other's ideas until we've given it a fair shot at development. At its worst, the phrase allows bold ideas to fly too close to the sun. At its best, though? We've just cleared the path for the next big thing!

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