

A WEEK IN *Learning*

Don't Make Assumptions About What Others Need

Anton Ray, Director of Learning & Development

I love food, and I love restaurants. So, it should come as no surprise that one of my favorite things to do is to try out new food at a new restaurant. It takes me to my happy place. Now, no matter how excited I am about trying out the latest foodie destination, one thing is sure to start my experience off on the wrong foot. What is it, you ask? It is when I call to ask one of two simple questions: (1) where are you located, or (2) what are your major crossroads? Instead of giving me a straightforward, concise answer such as, *we are in the Northeast corner of Camelback and Central*, the well-intentioned host proceeds to ask me where I am coming from. Cue my sarcastic inner demon that says, "Why? Is your location going to change based on where I am coming from? I didn't ask how to get there, I asked where you were." This happens to me often, and is one example of people making assumptions about what others need.

In life, we often encounter situations in which we feel the need to 'fill in the blanks' for others. Instead of asking questions, we want to connect the dots ourselves and jump ahead to the finish line. Even if we *are* asking questions, sometimes they are not the right ones. This is not an unfamiliar situation for leaders in the workplace, and it can hinder the way we support our team members.

Leading and motivating a diverse workforce requires that we pay attention to the unique needs of the people we are entrusted with leading. Paying attention to the unique needs of your team members is an important aspect of leading. **Individualized Consideration**, one element of Transformational Leadership, examines this very idea. What the research tell us is this: transformational leaders are those leaders that (among other things) **support and develop** their team members. They do this by taking a sincere interest in the well-being and welfare of the team member, along with paying attention to their development needs.

As leaders, we are charged with supporting, developing and enriching our team members' lives. To do this well, it is important that we do this in a way that feels authentic and tailored to the needs of each individual team member. When having developmental discussions:



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Do:

✓ **Check your assumptions/biases at the door.** Recognize that not everyone thinks and behaves like you. Focus on uncovering and understanding your team members' unique needs, and find ways to support them.

✓ **Focus on interests and motivations.** Lead a discussion centered on the team member's interests and motivations. You may learn that he/she loves to help people, enjoys leading projects, or likes creating processes/procedures. Whatever the case, taking this approach in a development discussion may yield surprising results. As a leader, you then add value by helping translate interests/motivations into a development goal.

Don't:

✗ **Don't** assume that you understand the development wants/needs of your team members.

✗ **Don't** jump the gun and tell your team members what their area(s) of development should be.

✗ **Don't** put your team member on the spot by asking a direct question like: what do you want to do to develop yourself? Sometimes this direct approach can backfire, triggering a blank stare and a feeling of awkwardness.

Leaders, when thinking about the support and development needs of your team members, follow the path of a transformational leader and invest the time to understand them. Demonstrate individual consideration by asking questions, listening, and above all else, not making assumptions about what others need.

To contact Goodwill's Learning and Development team, please email learninganddevelopment@goodwillaz.org