Increasing Your Approachability

We are all hardwired with an approach or avoid response. We approach when we feel safe and avoid when we don't.

Our approachability directly impacts the flow of information to us.   The more approachable we are, the more likely we are to receive complete information through both formal and informal channels. Are the decisions you make and the solutions you implement based on complete information?

- Sara was reluctant to tell her boss that she isn't being challenged because his impatience makes her feel like he's too busy to listen. He was shocked when she quit.

- Miguel has a question for his boss about rolling out a change. He approaches his boss's office several times to ask, but stops trying when he sees that the door is repeatedly closed. His question goes unanswered and mistakes follow.

- Jeff has an idea for how his team can overcome a challenge that has been plaguing them, but gives up when his boss doesn't return his calls.

The purpose of increasing approachability is to make people feel comfortable enough to bring you the information you need.

Focus on the following four characteristics of approachable leaders to increase your approachability.

1. **Look approachable.** People will be reluctant to approach you if your body language makes you look intimidating, disinterested, impatient, angry, aloof, or even arrogant. Closing your body by crossing your arms, looking at something other than the person talking, and having a negative expression creates a barrier that keeps people from approaching. To encourage people to bring ideas, information, questions, and problems, look open and welcoming. Make eye contact, keep your body open, and smile as you begin the conversation.

2. **Manage your reaction.** People who are afraid of your reaction to bad news will avoid bringing you bad news. That allows the problem to grow rather than giving you an opportunity to address it early. You want open, honest, direct, and complete communication. Keep in mind that people will come to you with both good and bad news. If you handle the bad news with patience and fairness, they are more likely to continue to keep the lines of communication open with you.Reinforce information sharing. Even with bad news, begin by saying, "Thanks for bring this to my attention", or "It's a good thing you're telling me this early before things got worse."

3. **Keep an open mind.** Don't assume you know what people are going to say. Listen to them with an open mind. When you cut people off too quickly, you risk missing information. Be open to new ideas, differences of opinion, and even that you may have made a mistake. When people believe your mind is closed, there is no point in communicating with you.

4. **Make time for informal conversations.** The stronger the relationship you build, the more likely people are to trust you and communicate openly. Take an interest in your team beyond just the work they do. Getting to know people builds trusting relationships. A simple "Good morning, how was your weekend?" can work wonders in making someone feel that you care about them. This doesn't require a lot of time. The purpose is to connect with people positively and to informally build relationships. This will increase your approachability and they will be more likely to communicate openly when it really matters.

In short, you want people to fee safe about bringing you the information you need. Approachability is critical to driving results because it increases the likelihood that people will bring you complete information when there is a problem, when they have an idea, when they have a question, or just when they have information they think would benefit you.

To find out more about how your team could increase their approachability, contact Dr. Heather Johnson at heather@klassenperformancegroup.com or 651-322-7821.