Conversations are the lifeblood of leadership. When leaders are adept at conversations they do much more than communicate effectively—they drive stronger business results.
Over the past 30 to 40 years perhaps the most significant change in the corporate landscape has been the transition from an economic society based on physical and tangible assets, such as plant and equipment, to one based on intangible assets, such as customer relationships, ideas, innovation, and brand.
WHAT CONSTITUTES SUCCESSFUL LEADERSHIP?

For over 40 years, DDI has conducted hundreds of studies. In one manner or another, all of our efforts have been aimed at addressing the same fundamental question: What constitutes successful leadership? We’ve learned which competencies predict leadership success and, conversely, which personality facets inhibit performance. We’ve also pinpointed the new challenges that loom for tomorrow’s leaders. And what is it that we’ve found that good leaders do? They foster innovation, keep customer needs front and center, develop long-term strategies, make countless decisions, and, perhaps most important, develop future talent.

These are the “whats” of leadership, but what about the “hows”? Across all of our research, one primary theme stands out: Little of what leaders do gets done alone. Great leadership depends largely on dozens of conversations leaders have every day—with employees, shareholders, customers, suppliers, and others.

From this fact emerges a more basic question: What then leads to successful conversations? The answer, we believe, lies in a set of core leadership behaviors we have come to call the Interaction Essentials®. When leaders engage in these behaviors consistently, their success soars. When they ignore them, or apply them poorly, they can expect to quickly fail.

Our insights are supported by research published in 2010 by McKinsey & Company. The McKinsey authors contend that successful efforts to exploit the growing importance of interactions has the potential to generate durable competitive advantage. They aptly label the ability of workers, at all levels, to leverage conversations as “relationship capital.”

In this report, we will define the Interaction Essentials® and show how leaders build relationship capital through their use. And, based on real assessment analytics across thousands of leaders, we will deliver a report card on how leaders are doing in this respect. We will end with recommendations on what leaders can do to build the value of their relationship capital.

The QR codes throughout this report will link you to short videos that provide additional perspective on the content of our research.
THE SKILLS LEADERS NEED FOR EFFECTIVE CONVERSATIONS

Human beings are social creatures. In our daily lives and at work, we are constantly interacting with others. Whether these interactions happen face-to-face, over the phone, or through email or text, the way we treat others and how we communicate with them makes an impact—for better or worse. So what are the skills required to conduct effective interactions day-to-day?

Through our 40-plus years of assessing talent, conducting research, and creating development programs, we have found that there exists a core set of skills everyone needs to master in order to effectively build relationships and get work done. We call these behaviors the Interaction Essentials™.

THE INTERACTION ESSENTIALS™

A wide range of interactions define a leadership role, including:

• Conducting team meetings
• Providing coaching
• Seeking input from stakeholders on key decisions
• Listening to customers
• Leading major changes
• Influencing the direction of a new structure
• Delegating tasks and assignments
• Conducting performance discussions

FIGURE 1: THE INTERACTION ESSENTIALS™
The Interaction Essentials represent key behaviors that underpin leader effectiveness. These behaviors are aligned with the two kinds of needs that people have during a conversation:

- Practical needs—to reach a productive outcome.
- Personal needs—to be valued, understood, involved, and supported.

The Interaction Essentials equip leaders with the skills needed to address both of these kinds of needs and to be successful in any type of interaction.

PRACTICAL NEEDS—INTERACTION GUIDELINES

Leaders can meet practical needs and structure the discussion by using five Interaction Guidelines. These guidelines, which form a five-step process, provide a direct route for the discussion—a route that will take leaders to clear and agreed-to outcomes.

OPEN: Ensures that discussions have a clear purpose and that everyone understands the importance of accomplishing it.

CLARIFY: There are two types of information to collect in this step—1) facts and figures, and 2) issues and concerns. Both are essential to building a complete picture of the situation.

DEVELOP: When developing ideas, it is important to ask questions and include others in the process. Most likely, leaders will have ideas about what to do, and they should share them. However, they should put equal emphasis on seeking others’ ideas.

AGREE: Leaders and the people involved in the conversation should agree on a plan for following through on the ideas that were developed and for supporting those who will take action.

CLOSE: The final chance to check that everyone is clear on agreements and next steps and committed to following through.

PERSONAL NEEDS—KEY PRINCIPLES

Personal needs are addressed through the Key Principles. Key Principles help leaders avoid hazards, take advantage of opportunities, and make others feel appreciated, understood, involved, and supported along the way.

The five Key Principles are:

- Maintain or enhance SELF-ESTEEM by being specific about what people do and why their contributions matter.
- Listen and respond with EMPATHY, showing understanding for the facts and feelings being expressed;
• Ask for help and encourage **INVOLVEMENT** by employing questions to unleash everyone’s ideas;
• **SHARE** thoughts, feelings, and rationale to build trust and provide context;
• Provide **SUPPORT** without removing responsibility to build ownership and accountability.

DDI research has consistently demonstrated that improvement in the ability to use these skills leads to increased performance. Unfortunately, the same research shows that most leaders lack these fundamental interaction skills.

In our recent global workforce study, *Lessons for Leaders from the People Who Matter: How Employees Around the World View Their Leaders*, 60 percent of workers indicated that their manager at least sometimes damages their self-esteem, while a third of respondents said their manager doesn’t remain calm and constructive when discussing a problem. The scorecard below (Figure 2) further supports the primary theme that emerged from the study: Leaders simply are not good enough when it comes to their interaction skills².

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**FIGURE 2: A LEADERSHIP BEHAVIOR SCORECARD SHOWING DATA FROM LESSONS FOR LEADERS FROM THE PEOPLE WHO MATTER GLOBAL RESEARCH**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>SCORECARD</strong></th>
<th><strong>Does your manager ask for ideas about how to solve problems?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most of the Time or Always</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Only Sometimes or Never</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your manager ask for ideas about how to solve problems?</td>
<td>51%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>49%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Does your manager help you solve problems without solving them for you?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most of the Time or Always</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Only Sometimes or Never</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your manager help you solve problems without solving them for you?</td>
<td>53%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th><strong>Does your manager give you sufficient feedback on your performance?</strong></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Most of the Time or Always</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td><strong>Only Sometimes or Never</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Does your manager give you sufficient feedback on your performance?</td>
<td>55%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>45%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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We will now look closely at the nature of conversations at the senior and frontline leadership levels and common mistakes that inhibit effective communication in the workplace.

**CONVERSATIONS UP THE ORGANIZATIONAL LADDER**

The ability to facilitate effective conversations is critical at every level of leadership. For frontline leaders, conversations are part of launching new products, facilitating customer interactions, or coaching team members. Even making good decisions can largely depend on how input from others is sought out. We sometimes assume interaction skills are mastered as leaders move up the ladder. After all, presumably they have been at it for a longer time. But as you will see below, nothing is further from the truth.

Yet, the importance of interaction skills is even greater at higher leadership levels. Executives must deal with broader and more diverse groups of stakeholders who pose significant challenges to their interaction skills. They need to balance the needs of multiple constituents who often bring competing needs and perspectives to the table.

And, working on and executing longer-term strategies—among the most important executive roles—also require successful conversations.

### In conversations, does your manager ask questions to ensure he/she understands what you are saying?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Most of the Time or Always</th>
<th>Only Sometimes or Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td>59%</td>
<td>41%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Does your manager adequately recognize your efforts/contributions?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Most of the Time or Always</th>
<th>Only Sometimes or Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td>60%</td>
<td>40%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### Does your manager handle work conversations efficiently?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Most of the Time or Always</th>
<th>Only Sometimes or Never</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Percent</strong></td>
<td>64%</td>
<td>36%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**SPOTLIGHT ON LEADERSHIP BEHAVIORS**

We will now look closely at the nature of conversations at the senior and frontline leadership levels and common mistakes that inhibit effective communication in the workplace.

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**We sometimes assume interaction skills are mastered as leaders move up the ladder...nothing is further from the truth.**
COMMON INTERACTION MISTAKES LEADERS MAKE

Globally, we have assessed thousands of senior leaders over the past 10 years. We do this through DDI’s Day-in-the-Life assessment processes. Through these assessment processes leaders are placed in a variety of interaction situations and evaluated against a broad range of skills, including the Interaction Essentials. The assessment evaluates the strength and frequency of these behaviors in common interaction situations. It is critical to point out that the data below are not based on survey responses, but on observations of actual leadership behavior (see below).

An analysis of these senior-level and frontline assessments highlights a number of common mistakes and tendencies when it comes to interactions. While leaders may demonstrate strengths in one aspect, it is the combination of elements that leads to high-quality interactions in the workplace. These data suggest that there is significant room for improvement. On the following page we describe the common themes and implications from the data.

DDI’S “DAY-IN-THE-LIFE” ASSESSMENT

Participants, who typically are senior-level leaders, assume the role of a newly hired executive in a large organization. Over the course of anywhere from one-half to two days, they will deal with a variety of tactical and strategic challenges that executives typically face.

This may include meetings with internal and external stakeholders, coaching discussions with a direct report, a meeting with a disgruntled customer, and a meeting with a peer to secure resources or resolve an internal conflict. In addition they will be asked to analyze a variety of background information about the organization and develop a strategic plan for its future success.

Participants are asked to behave as they would in their usual work environment. This enables DDI to examine and report back on their performance across critical competencies and behaviors. These senior-leader assessments usually take place at one of our acceleration centers, located in our offices around the world.

We have also developed a robust virtual platform for assessing frontline leaders, Manager Ready®, in which the same assessment methodology is adapted to assess for the competencies required for success at the frontline level.
TENDENCIES THAT UNDERMINE EFFECTIVE INTERACTIONS

OPERATING ON FLAWED OR UNRESOLVED ASSUMPTIONS
We found that only 12 percent of executives around the world are highly effective at clarifying assumptions and only 10 percent are highly effective in checking their understanding of a situation before moving on to addressing an issue. As such, they risk operating on flawed assumptions and making decisions that won’t reap the desired benefits. Frontline leaders are hardly better—only 15 percent are highly effective at clarifying situations before acting on them.

RELYING ON THEIR OWN IDEAS
Only 10 percent of executives assessed are highly effective at inviting ideas from others. Even if they seek to invite others to participate in discussions and decisions, they may miss the opportunity to gain the buy-in and commitment of the other party (only 7 percent of executives are highly effective in gaining others’ commitment). For frontline leaders, the trend was similar. They were better at encouraging involvement from others (49 percent of them are highly effective) than actually asking questions and facilitating others’ involvement (only 6 percent are highly effective).

NOT LISTENING AND RESPONDING TO CUES
We found that only 11 percent of executives are highly effective in demonstrating interpersonal diplomacy (e.g., displaying empathy and maintaining others’ self-esteem). Frontline leaders struggle in this area, as well: Only 24 percent are highly effective at responding to cues for maintaining others’ self-esteem and 38 percent are highly effective in demonstrating empathy for those with whom they are engaged in conversation.

NO CLARITY AROUND NEXT STEPS
Only 11 percent of executives and 10 percent of frontline leaders are highly effective in conveying their performance expectations and facilitating clear agreement on next steps. Without clarity and agreement, issues will often be left unresolved and critical time and resources can be wasted. This can significantly impact the productivity and outcome of discussions and lead to frustration for all involved.

BUILDING TRUST IN INTERACTIONS
Disclosing one’s own thoughts and feelings is a powerful way to build trust in a relationship. Unfortunately, only 5 percent of the executives assessed are highly effective in openly disclosing and sharing their thoughts and feelings with others. Without this critical foundation, leaders will continue to struggle getting things done through others if others do not trust them. Disclosing is not only a way to build trust, but also to add context and keep others informed.*

* We do not measure behaviors related to trust for frontline leaders.
WHY INTERACTIONS GO BAD

At some stage in their career most leaders have been on the receiving end of a poor conversation.

Because of this, they can recognize the characteristics of good and bad conversations. However, as DDI assessment data demonstrates, many leaders struggle to consistently and purposefully deploy these behaviors when required. The reasons for this include:

- Some leaders simply lack the fundamental frameworks, skills, and tools (such as the Interaction Essentials) to facilitate effective discussions.

- Others may lack the insight and awareness of personal characteristics that can derail their intentions and approach. For example a leader with a strong predisposition towards self-confidence may overvalue his or her own ideas and neglect to seek the input and ideas of others. The overuse of these tendencies can derail a conversation. Figure 3 on pages 12 and 13 summarizes common derailing tendencies and the implication of these on interactions. While derailers tend to play a larger role in senior leader failure, they can wreak havoc at any level.
SEVEN INTERACTION SINS

While the data confirm the poor state of interaction skills, they do not explain why. The seven interaction sins described below capture some of the common missteps that befall leaders—at all levels—when it comes to conducting effective conversations.

1. STRAIGHT TO FIXING THE PROBLEM
   Leaders, who have often been rewarded for getting things done and fixing problems, jump too quickly to presenting the solution. They fail to understand the context of a situation and miss opportunities to involve other parties.

2. ONE SIZE FITS ALL
   Over time leaders develop a preferred style and/or approach to meetings and interactions. They can be oblivious to the impact that this approach has on certain situations or individuals. They may also struggle to accommodate different perspectives.

3. AVOIDING THE TOUGHS ISSUES
   Many leaders struggle to address the tough issues, in particular performance issues. They lack the skills and insight to diffuse situations and/or tackle areas that are perceived to be more sensitive. As a result, the issues can be left unresolved, leading to increased tension and consequences.

4. INCONSISTENT APPLICATION ACROSS DIFFERENT CONTEXTS
   Leaders often adopt a different approach to different situations and contexts. Skills that they readily apply in one situation may not be deployed in another. For instance, the highest levels of empathy and diplomacy are often saved for situations where people are trying to influence peers. They are more likely to demonstrate diplomacy and tact, and will more effectively clarify a situation in order to calibrate each party’s understanding of the issue at stake.

5. INFLUENCING THROUGH THE FACTS ONLY
   Leaders need to spend much more time understanding the perspectives of others before presenting and positioning ideas. Too often they rely on logic and rationale to position an argument or point of view. Leaders need to embrace more subtle means that proactively build stakeholder networks and appeal to the unique needs and circumstances of particular stakeholders.

6. SPOTTING OPPORTUNITIES FOR CHANGE BUT FORGETTING TO ENGAGE OTHERS
   Leaders often recognize the need for change. They identify opportunities for improvement in areas such as products and processes. However they struggle to engage others in the change process. They don’t proactively encourage others to develop ideas, they oversimplify the issues surrounding change, and they show little appreciation for the impact of a change, assuming others will simply get on board.

7. NEGLECTING TO COACH IN THE MOMENT
   When asked to coach direct reports, leaders are generally effective at clarifying what performance is required, having an open dialogue, and offering support for future challenges. However, they often neglect to provide guidance “in the moment of need.” Furthermore, their assessment of development needs can be superficial, missing opportunities to investigate underlying performance gaps.
COMMON DERAILERS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERACTIONS

Based on research into leadership success and failure by DDI, Hogan and Hogan, and others, 11 key personality derailers have been identified. The median represents the performance of the derailer for executive-level leaders. The higher the number, the more likely derailing behaviors will negatively impact a leader’s performance. While the research on derailers has tended to look exclusively at executives*, we believe that derailer behaviors such as these can undermine lower-level leaders, as well.

**FIGURE 3: COMMON DERAILERS AND THE IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERACTIONS**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>COMMON DERAILERS</th>
<th>IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERACTIONS</th>
<th>GLOBAL MEDIAN</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>APPROVAL DEPENDENT</td>
<td>Seeks and needs praise or reassurance from others, particularly from people higher in the organization.</td>
<td>42</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARGUMENTATIVE</td>
<td>Skeptical, tense, perhaps paranoid or suspicious, focused on protecting their own interests, and likely to resist coaching and feedback.</td>
<td>59</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ARROGANT</td>
<td>Overly self-assured or confident, resulting in poor listening and/or dismissal of feedback from others.</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>ATTENTION SEEKING</td>
<td>Gregarious, charming, and persuasive, perhaps excessively so, which can result in becoming melodramatic and self-promoting.</td>
<td>66</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>AVOIDANT</td>
<td>Tend to be preoccupied with their own agendas, and may prefer to address issues covertly (avoiding more direct solutions), thus being perceived as procrastinators, manipulative, or stubborn.</td>
<td>55</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

* We do not measure behaviors related to trust for frontline leaders.

SCAN THE QR CODE TO VIEW A VIDEO ABOUT EXECUTIVE DERAILERS.
### COMMON DERAILERS

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ECCENTRIC</th>
<th>IMPERCEPTIVE</th>
<th>IMPULSIVE</th>
<th>PERFECTIONISTIC</th>
<th>RISK AVERSE</th>
<th>VOLATILE</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Creative and, accordingly, different from others, perhaps to the point of being unorthodox or even odd.</td>
<td>Not naturally inclined to read others’ behavior, intent, and motivations.</td>
<td>Impatient, unpredictable, and inclined to act before considering the consequences of actions.</td>
<td>Micromanagers, controlling, and demanding of others.</td>
<td>Indecisive, too deliberate, or reluctant to take unusual or unconventional actions due to overemphasis on the prospect of failure.</td>
<td>Have difficulty controlling their emotions, and are perhaps moody and quick to erupt in anger.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inclined to sell or position their own ideas and forget to “check in” with others.</td>
<td>Inability to truly connect with the other person’s emotional reactions and responses. No empathy.</td>
<td>Jumps to the solution too quickly. Doesn’t take time to understand or clarify assumptions or understanding of an issue.</td>
<td>May take on responsibility for issues and not involve other parties. Can lead to feelings of disempowerment.</td>
<td>Ideas to solve problems will be safe. May not embrace creative or unusual ideas.</td>
<td>Struggles to control emotions and therefore has difficulty building trust in discussions.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

### IMPLICATIONS FOR INTERACTIONS

- Inclined to sell or position their own ideas and forget to “check in” with others.
- Inability to truly connect with the other person’s emotional reactions and responses. No empathy.
- Jumps to the solution too quickly. Doesn’t take time to understand or clarify assumptions or understanding of an issue.
- May take on responsibility for issues and not involve other parties. Can lead to feelings of disempowerment.
- Ideas to solve problems will be safe. May not embrace creative or unusual ideas.
- Struggles to control emotions and therefore has difficulty building trust in discussions.
CONCLUSIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

SOLUTIONS FOR BETTER LEADERSHIP

So what can be done to enhance the quality of interactions in the workplace and in turn drive greater performance?

1. Access to core frameworks and development that support effective interactions.
   In the field of electronics a circuit breaker is an automatic electrical switch designed to protect an electrical circuit from damage caused by overload or short circuit. Its core function is to interrupt an otherwise damaging electrical flow. Interaction frameworks and tools, such as DDI’s Interaction Essentials, provide leaders with the circuit breakers they require to manage effective interactions. At the core of these frameworks there are processes to facilitate effective interactions, techniques to effectively manage the personal needs of a conversation, and core listening and questioning skills.

2. Start with wise promotion and solution decisions.
   Many of the skills and personality factors we have presented in this report are difficult, if not impossible, to change. (According to some research, 40 percent of leaders who are promoted fail within the first 18 months.*) You save time and energy downstream if you are sure you have the right leaders in your pipeline at the beginning.
3. Promote self-awareness—understanding the impact of personality patterns/derailing tendencies on interactions.

The transition to leadership is inevitably accompanied by more pressured and complex conditions. The stress that these conditions produce for leaders creates a petri dish for derailing tendencies such as emotional volatility, impulsivity, and avoidance of others. Although hard-wired traits are very difficult to change, leaders can be taught to manage them successfully.

Leaders need to:

- **Explicate and discuss** the tangible impact of derailing personality patterns on interactions, especially at senior levels. For example, if you are required to review a business strategy or priority, consider the impact of a leader with an arrogant derailing tendency. If the leader acts like a know-it-all in meetings and prevents others’ good ideas from surfacing, he or she becomes a barrier to generating effective solutions.

- **Heighten self-awareness** and sustain improvement in managing derailers by creating an open environment and ensuring the use of feedback skills. A leadership team that has an understanding of each other’s derailment tendencies and the skills and receptivity to provide feedback will be more successful avoiding situations that trigger these potentially destructive behaviors.

4. Recognize the importance of practice.

Leadership must be viewed as a practice, not an ideology. Mastering interaction and leadership skills is like every other discipline. It takes practice. How often we will get it right comes down to the quality and the frequency of practice.

**COMMON LEADERSHIP INTERACTION STYLES—WHICH ONE ARE YOU AND WHAT TO DO**

DDI has observed tens of thousands of leaders in common interaction situations. Based on our observations and assessment of key interaction behaviors, we have identified a number of common leadership interaction styles (page 16). While these styles may be situational, many leaders display a preference towards one or two styles.

For each of the common interaction styles there will be inherent strengths and weaknesses. With a better understanding of their style, leaders are better equipped to leverage the strengths and manage the potential risks.

It is useful to be aware that these dominant styles may reflect a leader’s underlying personality traits and therefore will be difficult to change. Furthermore, the approach they take may be different under high- and low-stress conditions. Using the Interaction Essentials, leaders are better equipped to manage the impact of their own style and enhance the quality and productivity of workplace interactions.
Focus on using the Clarify and Develop stages of the Interaction Guidelines to better understand the perspective and ideas of the other party. Be sure to include these in your assessment of the situation and development of the ideas. Focus on involvement and provide support while being mindful not to remove responsibility.

Needs to place greater emphasis on the personal needs of the discussion through Key Principles such as enhancing and maintaining self-esteem, sharing thoughts and feelings to build trust, and involvement. Focus on the use of more open questions to enhance involvement. Be sure to seek feedback and input on your own ideas.

Needs to place greater emphasis on the practical needs of the discussion through the use of the Interaction Guidelines. In the Open stage, be sure to clearly state the purpose and importance of the discussion. In the Agree stage, ensure there are clear actions and check for understanding.

Focus on using the Interrogator approach and recognize that others may not respond to a direct approach and therefore may need to Clarify both the facts and feelings associated with an issue. Consider using the Interaction Essentials with one-on-one conversations for potentially sensitive issues before jumping into an open group discussion.

Focus on involving the other person more through the use of open questions. Focus on maintaining the other party’s self-esteem in response to ideas and opinions offered and be open to developing ideas collaboratively. Can use the Share Thoughts and Feelings Key Principle to build trust.

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**WHICH ONES ARE YOU?**

**THE PROBLEM SOLVER** feels the need to solve problems on behalf of the other party. They may either jump straight to presenting the solution or clarify the situation simply to help them identify a solution.

**THE INTERROGATOR** will ask lots of questions (often with an overreliance on closed questions). They typically focus on drawing out the facts of a situation and less on feelings. The other party can often feel under the spotlight and may be reluctant to share perspectives or ideas.

**THE RELATIONSHIP BUILDER** tends to focus more on the relationship and less on the outcomes of a discussion. They will be very sensitive to the feelings of others and may not address the practical needs of the conversation. They may also be less likely to tackle the tough issues. They can often confuse empathy and sympathy. People can leave a conversation feeling “good” but with little resolution or direction.

**THE STRAIGHT TALKER** believes that everyone wants things out on the table and handled directly. They are less interested in the personal needs and will quickly dismiss any emotional responses or references. They believe an open, and “brutally” honest approach is the best. They rely on presenting facts and business rationale to gain support for a view or idea.

**THE SKEPTIC** whether consciously or sub-consciously appears to question the intentions of the other party. They tend to favor the tried and tested and will be less open to exploring creative or alternative approaches. The skeptic tends to use a lot of “why” questions. To the other party they can often appear challenging, overly pessimistic, and lacking receptivity to new ideas.

**WHAT TO DO—THE INTERACTION ESSENTIAL TIPS**

Focus on using the Clarify and Develop stages of the Interaction Guidelines to better understand the perspective and ideas of the other party. Be sure to include these in your assessment of the situation and development of the ideas. Focus on involvement and provide support while being mindful not to remove responsibility.

Needs to place greater emphasis on the personal needs of the discussion through Key Principles such as enhancing and maintaining self-esteem, sharing thoughts and feelings to build trust, and involvement. Focus on the use of more open questions to enhance involvement. Be sure to seek feedback and input on your own ideas.

Needs to place greater emphasis on the practical needs of the discussion through the use of the Interaction Guidelines. In the Open stage, be sure to clearly state the purpose and importance of the discussion. In the Agree stage, ensure there are clear actions and check for understanding.

Needs to put greater emphasis on the use of Key Principles, in particular empathy and self-esteem. Needs to recognize that others may not respond to a direct approach and therefore may need to Clarify both the facts and feelings associated with an issue. Consider using the Interaction Essentials with one-on-one conversations for potentially sensitive issues before jumping into an open group discussion.

Needs to involve the other person more through the use of open questions. Focus on maintaining the other party’s self-esteem in response to ideas and opinions offered and be open to developing ideas collaboratively. Can use the Share Thoughts and Feelings Key Principle to build trust.
THE MOTIVATOR emphasizes the positive and opportunities. While recipients may feel motivated and engaged, they often leave discussions lacking clarity on actions and next steps. Furthermore, perspectives and ideas are not openly questioned or challenged. The positive nature of the conversation may mask inherent skill and confidence gaps.

THE DETACHED avoids getting emotionally involved in discussions. While they remain very neutral, they can often appear distracted or even disengaged. Furthermore, they can be very difficult to read. As a result, others may misinterpret their intentions or actions and come to the conclusion that they don’t seem to care.

THE AGREEER often relies on the other party to take the lead in conversations. While they can be seen as agreeable and open to other perspectives, they often lack self-confidence and may not be willing to share their own perspective or ideas. In the end they may simply embrace the other person’s point of view. As a result, they will often miss the opportunity to express their own point of view, avoid the tough issues, and leave issues unresolved.

THE KNOW IT ALL likes to talk about themself and will constantly link the discussion back to their own experiences and ideas. They will always have an opinion. While their intent may be to share experiences as a way of demonstrating understanding, the other party will often leave the discussion feeling like their own perspective, feelings, or experience has been dismissed or not understood.

Needs to focus on the Clarify and Agree stages of the Interaction Guidelines. The Clarify stage will help to draw out all perspectives (both positive and negative). The Agree stage will ensure that there are clear actions and clarity on next steps. Involve the other party, provide support as needed and check for understanding throughout. Listen for, acknowledge, and respond to the emotions of the other person through the use of Empathy. Use Self-esteem statement to show you value the other person’s perspective and ideas. Share to help the other person understand your own perspective. Collaboratively Develop Solutions and Check for Agreement on actions and next steps in the Agree stage.

Be clear on the purpose and importance of the meeting during the Open stage. During the Clarify and Develop stages, share your own perspective and use the Share Key Principle to help others understand your perspective. Try not to overuse Involvement and be clear to close the discussion with clear actions and outcomes.

Needs to be present in the discussion and focus on listening. Needs to use Empathy statements and Clarifying Questions to demonstrate an understanding of the other party’s perspective. When developing ideas and solutions, needs to adopt a collaborative and involving approach.
AUTHORS

Mark Busine, General Manager, DDI Australia
Mark consults with organizations to determine appropriate human resource and talent management strategies and implement large-scale succession management and talent development programs. He has extensive experience in organizational development and consulting in both an internal and external capacity. Mark has presented at numerous conferences and seminars on areas such as succession management, leadership development, selection, and employee feedback systems.

Bruce Watt, Ph.D., Managing Director, DDI Australia
Bruce is responsible for the creation and implementation of DDI’s business strategy in Australia. He works closely with clients, identifying needs and proposing solutions specifically in the areas of talent, succession management, leadership development, and selection. Bruce also provides business-relevant solutions to a diverse range of both private and government sector organizations in areas including success profile management, organizational change, performance management, and executive assessment and development.

Richard S. Wellins, Ph.D., Senior Vice President, DDI
Rich leads DDI’s research programs, launching new solutions, building strategic alliances, and executing marketing strategies. An expert on leadership development, employee engagement, and talent management, Rich has written for more than 40 publications and published six books. He has made over 100 presentations at numerous professional conferences around the world and is a judge for CNBC’s Asian Business Leaders Award.

Jazmine Boatman, Ph.D., Senior Consultant, DDI Consulting Services
Before moving into a key client consulting role in 2013, Jazmine managed DDI’s Center for Applied Behavioral Research (CABER), DDI’s hub for research to support evidence-based management. Jazmine has directed research on the impact of selection and development programs on organizational performance and uncovered new knowledge and information about global workplace practices and issues. She has also consulted with organizations in a wide variety of industries.
FOOTNOTES


FURTHER REFERENCES

ABOUT DEVELOPMENT DIMENSIONS INTERNATIONAL:
For over 40 years, DDI has helped the most successful companies around the world close the gap between where their businesses need to go and the talent required to take them there.
Our areas of expertise span every level, from individual contributors to the executive suite:
• Success Profile Management
• Selection & Assessment
• Leadership & Workforce Development
• Succession Management
• Performance Management
DDI’s comprehensive, yet practical approach to talent management starts by ensuring a close connection of our solutions to your business strategies, and ends only when we produce the results you require.
You’ll find that DDI is an essential partner wherever you are on your journey to building extraordinary talent.