



Using Effective Leadership Strategies in the Workplace

Use the Seuss to Keep the Group Loose

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When was the last time someone read to you? I mean a book, not a short article from the newspaper. really read to you. You remember, don't you? "Put down your pencils, class, it's story time." a chance to relax - your favorite time of the day, usually after math, or better yet, right after little Tommy launched his PB and J sandwich clear across the cafeteria and into your jello at lunch.

Do you remember the stories? What were they about? Who read them to you, and how it made you feel? Then ask yourself, "Why doesn't anyone read to me anymore?" Of course, if you're a parent, you read to your young children. But somewhere around the age of ten the reading-out-loud thing slows down, and doesn't start back up. Adults seldom read to other adults and, as a result, an opportunity for intimacy - and for learning - is lost. As a trainer, you can rediscover this effective learning tool by surprising your group with a favorite childhood story, entertaining them while at the same time introducing or reinforcing important points from the topic at hand.

During training programs, I often use children's books to complement key presentation points. One of my favorite authors, Theodore Geisel (a.k.a. Dr. Seuss), is perfect to illustrate, among other things, elements of effective communication skills and how people react to change. Reading is a great break in the action, and you should see the looks on peoples' faces when I tell them to put down their pens and notebooks and I pull out The Cat in the Hat ("I know that it's rainy and the sun is not sunny, but we can still have lots of good fun that is funny.") They think, "What's this got to do with anything we've talked about?", or more often, "Has this guy lost his marbles?" That is, until they realize that The Cat in the Hat has everything to do with transactional analysis (TA) and the way that we interact with each other as "parents, adults, and children" (for those of you who haven't read the Cat lately, look around - it's got to be in the house somewhere.

In the story, there are the kids (home alone, unfortunately), the fish, and the (in)famous Cat in the Hat with his sidekicks, Thing One and Thing Two (who are obviously having a bad hair day). Each one of these characters represents a way in which we interact and communicate with others. I'll give you a hint: the fish is the "parent": authoritative, bossy, and always pointing a fin(ger).

What follows is a lively and entertaining discussion of the elements of TA, with participants sharing real life examples of the Parent-Adult-Child model in action. Everything we've talked about as a group pertaining to effective communications seems to come together. Months - or even years - later, when I see former trainees, they invariably remember the lessons learned from the Cat.

While I often use the Cat in the Hat to reinforce concepts pertaining to effective communication skills, my favorite Dr. Seuss book for introducing the concept of change in the workplace is Green Eggs and Ham. All the elements are there: why people resist change, the lengths to

which they'll go not to change, why change is hard work, and what the ultimate benefits of change can be.

Green Eggs and Ham also provides a good springboard for a discussion of creativity and problem-solving, and thinking "outside of the box". The reluctance of the story's protagonist to try the green eggs and ham under any circumstances, despite the efforts of Sam-I-Am, is a good example of the one dimensional thinking that often causes organizational gridlock.

So before you rule out reading to a group of trainees - "I could not, would not, read to my class. I could not would not, or it could mean my ..., remember, as someone else said, that people will forget what you say, and people will forget what you do, but people will never forget how you made them feel. Reading makes them feel good, and helps them to remember.

Try it, try it, and you'll see, there are many books that hold the key! In the process, you'll discover that kids' books aren't always just for kids - and neither is reading out loud.

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