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People Make The Difference whitepaper

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Want high performance? Try some disagreement in your team.

Nobody likes going to the doctor; many people avoid it for years and yet it is important to receive check-ups regularly to ensure you are healthy. In much the same way, there are very few people who enjoy conflict and disagreement.

There can be a tendency amongst many leaders to avoid even a hint of disagreement. Yet I believe disagreement – used well – can be key to a high performing team.

Yes, disagreements can be extremely uncomfortable, but it is a sign of a healthy team when robust, honest, conversations – where all parties can come to the table and leave it respectfully disagreeing – take place. Having trust amongst leaders and teams – as discussed in an earlier article – is a key part of ensuring that you leave a meeting respectfully supporting the decision, whether you agreed with it or not.

It's akin to the saying, 'what happens in Vegas stays in Vegas' – so even if a leader does not agree with a decision made, they are 100% supportive outside the meeting.

We're not all the same: how to disagree healthily

All industries are encouraged to be diverse when it comes to their employees and this sentiment includes diversity when it comes to personalities, ideas and past experiences.

Under different leaders, disagreement can have very different results. A leader who encourages healthy disagreements will see the results in stronger, independent teams, closer relationships and enhanced approaches to their work.

Yet if disagreements and conflicts in your workplace are ending in damaged relationships, low morale, defeatist attitudes, anger and a general reluctance to continue in sharing

opinions, then changes must be made to foster a healthy approach to disagreements amongst team members.

It is important, regardless of the nature of the disagreement, to resolve it. Leaving any conflict unresolved is a recipe for disaster. The conflict will come back sooner or later. So make sure that you always get to an agreed position before you close any meeting. Leaving something open will only cause factional groups to gather and discuss outside the confidentiality of the meeting room.

It is important to remember that in a healthy team, disagreements are not something to be 'won' – instead, a leader's role is to encourage a solution that combines the ideas of everyone involved. Creating a culture of winners and losers - or striving to win arguments - only damages relationships and evokes bitterness.

When it comes to disagreements, there are six simple steps you can take to create an environment where creative and individual thought is encouraged:

- Prioritise trust and honesty
- Support others' viewpoints
- Be respectful
- Listen attentively
- Focus on the facts rather than your emotional opinion
- Remember that everyone's opinions matter

Above all, see conflict as an opportunity to learn and embrace the differing opinions and approaches. A team void of disagreements is a team that rejects the idea of learning, innovation and independent thought. Without learning, individuals and teams tend to stay stagnant.

However, know when to pick your battles – do not tolerate bullies within your team. Make sure you are familiar with each of your team members and know when to differentiate between a disagreement and an attack from a bully. Also find time to workshop as a leadership team on how to be a high performing team and what that looks like to the group. Honesty and trust is key to making sure your team is effective as possible.

If you want to learn how to be a leader who encourages the diversity of opinions amongst those you lead, People Make The Difference can help you with training workshops, one-on-one coaching and Coach On Call services. To find out more, call us on 0412 333 415 or visit peoplesmakethedifference.com.au