



# Conversations that generate results

What we say and do impacts who we are and what we create. By Jackie Sloane

**S**ome time ago, the front page of the *New York Times* business section reported the cautionary tale of a CEO who'd sent off a rant to 400 of his managers. Too few cars in the parking lot at certain hours were clear evidence of bad management, low productivity and irresponsibility, in his view. The belligerence in his tone, the threats and the questionable logic made his email apparently irresistible to forward. Posted on Yahoo! a week later, it was also read by analysts, investors and journalists. Within days, the firm's stock price dropped 22 percent.

The CEO said he wanted to "light a fire" but wished he had never sent the email. Had he thought through the result he was seeking to produce in others, he might have taken a different approach entirely.

How and what we communicate impacts the results we can achieve. What are you generating around you when you communicate? Enthusiasm? Innovation? Accountability? Or something else?

We create possibility, relationships, our reputation and a mood around us as we act and use language. If this leader had explored his theory in a

few conversations with his staff, he might have learned something and stimulated ownership. Conversation is a powerful leadership tool that can transform situations and relationships.

I've worked with many clients who've cultivated greater authority and respect, become more powerful leaders and produced sometimes amazing results with their bosses, peers and teams through how they plan and conduct generative conversations.

Generative leadership communication begins with clearly thinking through what you want to generate in others in both the short and long term. For any important conversation or communication, particularly something you or others are emotional about, use this checklist to determine the best approach:

**Specify outcomes.** What specific, measurable result are you seeking? What is the larger organizational goal associated with this particular communication? For example, "light a fire" is vague, not strategic.

**Focus on your audience.** What really matters to those whose participation you need? Berating can work in the short term, but it kills their spirits and won't produce sustainable results. You'll also lose top people.

**Engage people.** How can you connect with what really matters to your audience? How do you want listeners to feel as a result of what you say? One manager who attended my Generative Leadership Communication program at her firm wanted her staff to partner with her to be more productive. She knew contributing to the fast-growing company's success mattered to them, and not only because of its profit sharing. She sought to empower them and did. They reduced production time by 50 percent for a new product. She was promoted to run the entire facility a year later.

**Make a clear request.** What is the specific action you want someone to take? The manager above asked her line workers to determine among themselves the most cost-effective way to produce a new product, including which machines to use, and to change the approach if they found a better one. Essentially, she taught them to innovate.

**Negotiate agreement.** Don't assume; confirm. The manager asked to be alerted immediately if her projected time frame of five days would not be met or would be reduced. Through their creativity, her staff produced the product in two 10-hour days. 

JACKIE SLOANE is an executive coach specializing in leadership communication. Her clients achieve greater satisfaction and results through how they and their teams communicate, engage others and cultivate relationships.