

QBQ! (The Question Behind the Question) QuickNote #13

"Why don't they communicate better?"

Thousands of times, it seems, I've asked groups, "What is your most critical business problem today?" Nine times out of ten without hesitation the "C" word is offered. Not *Change*. Not *Competition*. Not *Complexity*. What is it? You guessed it:

Communication!

And it's always - yes, always - somebody else's fault! Nobody has ever stood up and said, "You know, I think today I'll help address that problem by simply working on my ability to communicate!" Of course, to say that, two things would be required:

- 1) Personal accountability.
- 2) An understanding of what true communication is.

The author Stephen Covey taught us to "Seek to understand." But before him, W. Steven Brown, my mentor for many years and author of "13 Fatal Errors Managers Make ..." shared this:

Communication does not begin with being understood, but with understanding the other person.

Of course, to *understand* the other, we might need to *talk* to them. Or, we could always go the alternate route and have an -

Email War!

Time for some good old %*#@! over the company network. This war has its own form of "rat-a-tat-tat" as we type away on the keyboard before us.

There we are, hunkered down in our cubicle, corner office, or field site, ignoring the device Alexander Graham Bell gave us and the two feet God blessed us with. In the glow of the computer screen, we loft a volley to the other side. Like trench-protected troops in World War I we hope against hope that when they lob one of their own grenades back it will miss the mark, showing a Logic Gap in their argument so we can know that they are wrong and we are right. (And if there is a Logic Gap, our reply will be CC'd to all the troops and commanders to read.)

These email wars do reveal a deep "We/They" divide within our cultures that hurts us in every way imaginable. And the sad part is, WE'RE ON THE SAME TEAM! To the customer/client base "out there" we have the same organizational name. We are one. But inside, communication with each other is a daily struggle. Some, of course, try to deny this reality ...

I'll never forget the VP who claimed there was no "We/They" in his firm. When I expressed my surprise by saying, "What, no cross functional friction? No Field versus the Home Office? No Ops versus Sales?!" He proudly responded, "Nope, there's no "We/They" around here - but it is Us against Them!"

How many of you reading this think we can each do better? It simply takes an attitude of accountability and a good question. We call it the QBQ! *The Question Behind the Question:*

"How can I better understand you and your needs today?"

That question alone could end the war and cause peace to come to our organizations. As a united front we will serve the customer and serve them well.

As a young salesperson of his training programs, I once asked author Steve Brown why he taught what he taught. What was he trying to accomplish? His response was simple. He said, "*I'm simply trying to get people to talk to each other.*"

Using *QBQ!*s like the one above, let's *talk* to each other today. Great things might happen!

John G. Miller
author of the *QBQ!* book.