

3 Tips for Communicating with Assertive, Hard-Driving, Fast-Moving Type A Bosses

Never has it been more important for the people on the front lines (and back offices) of businesses to communicate to their leaders and managers:

- What they see in the marketplace
- What they know about customer needs and concerns
- What they know about internal processes – what works and what doesn't
- What they know about the barriers to change and what it would take to mobilize the work force behind a company-wide change initiative in response to changing marketplace needs
- What they believe about the company and what makes it a good (or difficult) place to work

Yet communicating with bosses or colleagues who are Drivers can be a daunting experience. They don't seem to listen, they move on to the next point before you can finish your first sentence and they grow impatient when it takes you a moment to gather your thoughts to answer their rapid-fire questions. And once you have gotten it all out on the table, they immediately begin to dispute your facts or conclusions.

But believe it or not, most Drivers really do care about what you have to say. And even if they don't, you owe it to yourself, to your organization and to them to get your points across.

Would you be willing to try to bridge to their style of communication? Here are 3 tips:

- **Get Their Attention First** – You can't be too direct with a Driver. They prefer short, clipped sentences. They want to know your objective before they give you their full attention. Use attention-getting statements to alert a Driver that you have an important message you'd like for him/her to hear:
 - I have a solution that will improve staff morale.
 - I need your input on the XYZ account.
 - I need a decision on the XYZ situation.
 - I need you attend a meeting tomorrow.
 - I have two options to present on the XYZ decision.

If you can get their attention in the first few seconds, you then have about 2 minutes to present the essentials of your request, recommendation or idea. You know you've hooked their interest if they ask you for more details.

The same principle applies to emails and phone calls as to face-to-face communication. Put the meat of the message in the first line because they may not read or listen to the second one.

- **Be Ready and Willing to Debate** – Drivers love to debate. It's a sign that they are engaged if they throw your idea back at you with a rebuttal or challenge. Drivers are stimulated by rapid-fire discussion of conflicting positions (and sometimes take the opposite viewpoint, depending on who they are talking to). They believe that the best ideas “prove themselves” and become stronger if they can withstand the challenge of a good argument.
 - Be ready to go head-to-head with a Driver. Have your arguments and facts ready and deliver them in short, steady punches.
 - If you lose the first round, look them right in the eye and say “I’ll think about what you said, but I’ll be back.”
 - Never assume that they are debating because they already have a fixed position that cannot be changed. In fact, Drivers are usually ready to abandon a current position in favor of a better one (unless they are also Procedure-Oriented Process Builders).
 - Even if they win the argument, don’t assume that you didn’t score any points. You are likely to see them advocating your idea in the future, even if it has been slightly modified.

- **Be Clear and Sharp** – A Driver will take a fuzzy or rambling answer as a sign that you don’t have a valid opinion on the subject, that you haven’t really thought about the issue. So don’t let them put you in a position where you can’t be at your best.
 - If a Driver asks you a question and you’re not ready to answer or cannot answer the question in a clear, concise manner, play for more time. Say simply and directly, “I’ll have to get back with you on that. I’ll stop by your office this afternoon.”
 - If you have time, prepare for a meeting with a Driver by writing out your responses to expected questions. After writing your first draft, rewrite it, getting it down to 25 words or less.
 - If you get zapped by a Driver for being fuzzy or rambling, retreat and regroup. Don’t try to make it better by continuing to think the issue through in the moment. Say, “I will have a response to you by day’s end.”

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