

THE BRIGHT SIDE® OF CHANGE

Written by Donna Rae Smith

Overcoming Control

Terrence is a rising star. He has recently been appointed president of a business group for a financial company. He's well poised to be the next CEO. There's only one thing potentially in his path: himself.

The Challenge: Like many leaders, Terrence's gifts are overshadowed by his need to always appear in control. In any situation, he can be counted on to have a ready answer. Over-preparation is a hallmark of his work style. There's absolutely no room for not getting it right, and this expectation extends to his staff.

Behind Terrence's polished exterior is an aversion to risk. He cares deeply how others perceive him; appearing intelligent and capable is of paramount importance. He avoids going out on a limb because he doesn't want to risk being wrong, looking unprepared, or failing. Always preferring to play it safe, he stifles the creativity and innovation of everyone who reports to him.

His meetings are rigidly structured, with timed agendas. Invariably he directs and dominates the discussion, not allowing others an opportunity to contribute. The irony is, he has good people skills! But his need for control often prevents him from using those skills to engage others.

While his high-control leadership style has succeeded in getting him this far, he is now hitting a wall. He's blocking the growth and performance of the individuals who report to him, and the team as a whole.

The Solution:

I suggested to Terrence that at his next meeting, he shake things up. He needs to dispense with his standard meeting format and intentionally try a new approach. His goal should be to create an environment that encourages creativity and expression.

It's not going to be easy the first few times. It will demand breaking out of his safe zone. But without the courage to experiment, he and everyone around him will fail to reach their potential.

By asking him to experiment with new and different behaviors, I am leading him to face his own fears of not being in control, in order to see if different results can be achieved.



How he responds to the new approach will determine whether he launches himself and his team forward to expand performance and productivity, or falls back into the comfortable ways that are limiting him.

The Experiment: Try a more participatory format at your next meeting.

1. **Delegate.** Ask specific participants to prepare and present the agenda topics for review, input, ideas, decisions, solutions, etc.
2. **Focus.** Limit the meeting to no more than two or three topics and keep it under an hour. Narrowing the agenda and the meeting length will promote engagement.
3. **Be patient.** Hold questions until after each topic has been presented. Allow each speaker their allotted time.
4. **Engage.** Ask the following four questions after each presentation:
 - a. What engaged you about this presentation?
 - b. What concerns you based on what you heard presented?
 - c. What questions do you have based on this presentation?
 - d. What additions do you feel are needed to perfect this outcome?
5. **Hold your tongue.** Give sufficient time to hear the responses to the questions, and don't allow yourself to interrupt or cut people off.
6. **Capture** next steps and assignments to report on for the next meeting
7. Write us and let us know how it felt to change your meeting format. After you try this technique a few times, let us know whether you notice a difference in participation levels and idea generation.

THE CONVERSATION: Share the results of your experiment in the comments below or contact the author directly at donnarae@bright-side.com.

ABOUT DONNA RAE SMITH

Donna Rae Smith is a guest blogger for Smart Business. She has forged a career, enterprise and an applied discipline on the practice of teaching leaders to be masters of change. She is the Founder and CEO of Bright Side, Inc., a transformational change catalyst company with an emphasis on the behavior-side of change. For more than two decades, Donna Rae Smith and the Bright Side team have been recognized as innovators in executing behavioral strategies coalesced with business strategies to accelerate and sustain business results. Bright Side®, The Behavioral Strategy Company, has partnered with over 250 of the world's most influential companies. For more information, please visit www.bright-side.com or contact Donna Rae at donnarae@bright-side.com.

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