

How to Know What's Scaring Your Team Right Now

Try this easy exercise to turn anxiety into productive dialogue.

By Karin Hurt



“Is your team sharing their real concerns?”

I was frustrated recently while leading a strategic planning retreat. I had a hunch we weren't getting to the heart of the plan we were considering. So I gave everyone an index card, with the letter H on the front and the letter F on the back. I asked them to write one “hope” they had for this plan on the front and one “fear” they had on the back.

I collected the cards and sorted them into themes. The hopes fell into a few categories. They hoped the strategy would lead to increased revenue and improve the brand. They were united in the vision of why this was important. Great. That's a vital start.

But what was really interesting were the fears, or should I say *the* fear.

There was no sorting necessary. Every single person was scared of *exactly* the same thing: Could they count on the other people in the room to execute this strategy well?

It was a crucial fear that was undermining our planning effort. But no one had brought it up.

After I read 2/3 of the cards out loud, the point was made. Yikes. If the senior team was this worried about one another's ability to execute, how would they convince others to take those risks?

Before they did anything else, they needed to talk about their concerns.

What happened next was pure magic. Once we made it simple and safe to talk about people's fears, they were able to bond in new ways, support one another, and work together to make our strategies work.

Use this tactic at your next meeting. Encourage people to talk about what's scaring them and see what difference it makes. 

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Straight Talk about Emotions

Leaders too often ignore the impact of people's feelings not only in daily life but when making decisions, communicating vital information, making major changes, and raising funds. Reduce fear, motivate people, and use emotion to advantage with the tips in articles at NonprofitWorld.org:

Leading from Feeling (Vol. 27, No. 1)

Fear & Memory (Vol. 38, No. 4)

Nested at the Heart: A New Approach to Nonprofit Leadership (Vol. 29, No. 6)

How to Add an Emotional Hook to Your Fundraising Letters (Vol. 37, No. 1)

Dealing with Change in A VUCA World (Vol. 37, No. 4)

Smart and Fast Are Not Enough: The Need for Better EQ (Vol. 29, No 1)

Why Feedback Is the Key to Your Success (Vol. 35, No. 3)

Overcome People's Resistance with These Steps (Vol. 38, No. 3)

Leaders as Midwives Who Birth a New World (Vol. 28, No. 5)

To Make an Impact, Improve Your Non-Verbal Awareness (Vol. 38, No. 3)

How to Improve the Process of Change: The Sanctuary Model (Vol. 28, No. 6)

Be a Better Leader by Being a Careful Listener (Vol. 37, No. 1)

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