

Big Mistake ² } Not Beginning
With the
End in Mind

All that we are is the result of what we have thought.

—Buddha

Think before you speak. This is such a basic concept, yet it is so hard to put into practice. Everything we say has a consequence—positive or negative. If we don't know our big-picture goal, our communication can affect the outcome in a negative way. If we know our goal and we think through the “why,” “what,” and “how,” we have a better chance of affecting our relationships in a positive way. There are spontaneous conversations, and there are conversations for which we have time to plan and think through while keeping the end goal in mind.

On the Side

“A colleague of mine recently said he was upset that I didn't include him in a meeting he thought he should have been invited to. This was a spontaneous conversation where someone was upset with me, and I didn't have an opportunity to plan my response. I could have reacted and responded in many different ways. Engaging in a

negative way could have created other problems. This situation made me realize I need to be mindful of the words I use to achieve my goals.”

—Social media manager for an events company

If someone does something that you don’t like or agree with, do you tell them? Well, what is your goal? Do you know what actually happened, or are you making assumptions about what happened? If you say something, what will the outcome look like? Is there a potential to create problems and break down a long-term relationship because of a judgment or feeling you have? Be aware that some bridges can never be rebuilt.

Different parts of our brain dictate how we behave. Without getting into the specifics of the brain and the accompanying

studies, let’s discuss how the brain has an effect on keeping the communication goal in mind at all times. Our brain has three areas: the two that we will discuss here (and were mentioned in the previous chapter), are the intellectual and reptilian/animal parts of the brain. When we do not have a “goal in mind,” we open a window to

Definition of Emotional Intelligence

“Emotional intelligence is the ability to perceive emotions, to access and generate emotions so as to assist thought, to understand emotions and emotional knowledge, and to reflectively regulate emotions so as to promote emotional and intellectual growth.”

—John Mayer and Peter Salovey,
developers of the theory of
emotional intelligence

react at will. When we plan ahead, we are in control of those basic brain reactions. In business, those reactions rarely have a positive outcome. How does one put the intellectual part of the brain into play and lower the chances of the animal part just reacting? Plan ahead. Think about the conversation you

are about to have. Write down all of the negative things that can come out of it and how the other person may react. Think through the reactions and how you would respond accordingly to meet your goal. This is how you grow your emotional intelligence in the workplace.

On the Side

“Planning conversations allows you to cultivate the skills you need to identify and align your goals with those of the person you are meeting with, and to best articulate your plan in a way that lends itself to the preferred communication style of your audience. By nature, I am an incredibly emotional and sensitive person. I take things personally, and the majority of the time, ‘words hurt’ the most. I found myself unable to communicate the way I was thinking because it was clouded by the way I was ‘feeling.’ I was repeatedly unable to get my point across, no matter how valid or well supported, because I was coming across as upset or excited, and the people I was trying to get buy-in from had already disregarded my point within the first five minutes of our conversation.

“Learning how to effectively plan conversations has truly revolutionized the way I interact in the corporate world. It has allowed me the ability to communicate most effectively depending on the goals of every single conversation that I have. I’ve become far more productive, my relationships with my teammates have improved, and I’m developing a more professional and respected reputation with my peers and leadership alike. Taking a few extra minutes to plan your conversations really goes a long way!”

—Alexandra Wilinski, Capgemini

Best Practices

- Realize that the past can affect someone’s perception about a situation.

- ▶ When possible, plan your conversation to make sure your communication matches your goal.
- ▶ Plan out the negative reactions that could occur and how you are going to handle not getting triggered from the other person's reaction.
- ▶ Think about your timing and its effects; the context of a situation can affect everything.
- ▶ Everyone has their own agenda; look at both sides.
- ▶ Seek clarity before making assumptions.
- ▶ Think before you speak. Even when you are put on the defensive, remember your goal.
- ▶ Think about what you will achieve by saying something.

Ask Yourself These Crucial Questions

- ▶ Have I wished that I could take back something I said to a colleague?
- ▶ If I could change the outcome, what would I do differently the next time? What did I learn?
- ▶ How can I better manage my reactions and emotions to reach my communication and relationship goals?