Independent Banker
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Portfolio

[hed] Six hats: How to dress up discussions

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In the run-up to Halloween, consider dressing up your meetings as a way of encouraging robust and honest dialogue.

Workdays can bring both exciting opportunities and challenging headwinds, and often it’s the ability to have open dialogue that makes it easier to manage both. Being able to communicate effectively within your team can unlock potential for new ideas, products and efficiencies. Done right, healthy dialogue leads to greater transparency and removes defensiveness within teams.

Before we get to the hats, let’s look at how to encourage dialogue that is both robust and healthy. Here are some ideas.

1. **Find a balance**. Say what needs to be said, but don’t forget to listen to what your team has to say.
2. **Focus on the topic at hand**. In the thick of conversation, it’s easy to go astray. So, save the tangents for later.
3. **Invite everyone’s input**. Let them know that you want them to be honest. Ask questions and use the phrase “tell me more” to invite candor.
4. **Provide feedback**. Acknowledge honest thoughts, and let your team know that those thoughts are appreciated. This also gives you an opportunity to redirect any negative behaviors or approaches.
5. **Hold a poll**. This is an alternative way of taking the temperature in the room that considers—and documents—everyone’s opinion. Polls can be anonymous if needed, allowing your team to voice opinions without pressure.

Now for the dressing up! Consider using psychologist Edward de Bono’s “Six Thinking Hats” as a tool. We adopted this technique in a recent strategic, cross-departmental meeting that required focus and where we expected multiple perspectives to be shared.

Sometimes, it takes a nudge for us to think differently about issues, and this tool challenges our brains to try something new. The six hats are as follows: white for facts (neutral, objective), black for cautions (devil’s advocate), red for feelings (instinct, emotion), blue for process (discipline, focus), yellow for benefits (positive thinking) and green for creativity (new ideas).

We challenged everyone to wear each of the colored hats at one point during the meeting but gave them the freedom to decide when they did it. The hats can be used in sequence to work through a process. For example, start with the white hat to present a fact, use the red hat to express gut instincts and turn to the green hat to bring up new ideas.

Six Thinking Hats is a collaborative brainstorming tool, and as an approach, it really resonated with the team—so much so that they’ve referred to putting on their green hats or black hats in subsequent discussions. And finally, the hats don’t have to be real, but it might be more fun if they are, especially if you throw in a witch’s hat for seasonal color!

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