



Liz on Leadership

Three Great Reasons to Build Bridges

Last week, our local high school hosted 25 French high school students. We personally hosted a soft-spoken, polite 15-year-old boy named Corentin. The other 24 teens were dispersed among an array of local families. The exchange is part of a new program, run by our high school language department, designed to give French students a firsthand experience of life in America. Next year, the American kids will travel to France.

Throughout the week, the French and American students spent a great deal of time together. They attended classes, went on field trips to Philadelphia, Princeton and Amish country, played laser tag, ate burgers, cheesesteaks and Italian Ice, and wrapped up the week with pizza and a bonfire at a local student's home. Day by day, the French kids improved their English skills and the Americans began to converse in French. They shared freely of themselves and rapidly learned about one another's families, schools, foods, favorite activities and political points of view. Most importantly, they formed fast friendships, building bridges and creating bonds to last a lifetime.

It doesn't take much to build a bridge: just a measure of openness and curiosity, the willingness to share ideas and an eagerness to try new things. And the benefits can be profound. Here are three great reasons to build bridges in your organization:

1. **Innovation accelerates.** In my work with executives in organizations large and small, it's a consistent finding: isolation breeds stagnation, connection feeds innovation. When employees talk to one another across levels, departments, regions and business units, ideas flow, creativity surges and the discovery of your next great innovation is only a matter of time.
2. **Results improve.** When a company lacks effective and open team dialogue, fails to foster the "cross-pollination" of ideas, or lacks adequate

connections to industry and customers, results invariably suffer. The best outcomes arise in the context of multi-directional communication among a diversity of stakeholders. It is under these conditions that successes can be replicated and repetitive mistakes avoided—as success in one area becomes the catalyst for a thriving organization.

3. **The future shines brighter.** When you build connections across your organization, you uncover opportunities for growth. You discover talent. You identify successors and learn how to prepare top candidates for the roles of tomorrow. And, above all, you create a culture of trust, robust debate and deep commitment—essential stuff for maximizing today’s outcomes and forging the path to a remarkable tomorrow.

Did you miss our last newsletter?

Politics in the Workplace: Healthy Debate or Toxic Stew?

There’s just no getting around it. It seems wherever you turn these days, deep political and socio-economic churn are at the forefront of conversation. Across social media platforms, in social settings, and even in the workplace, heated political discussion has become the norm. The intensity is palpable.

And that’s something of a double-edged sword. On one hand, deeply-held personal conviction, heightened awareness, and the willingness to engage in open debate are a powerful combination—one that can lead to the broadening of perspectives and a meeting of minds. It can be a catalyst for the collaborative development of potent solutions to profound challenges. And indeed, I encourage my clients to actively engage their organizations in dialogue and debate, to communicate openly and dig deep to uncover concerns and ideas that might otherwise remain underground.

On the other hand, in today’s highly charged environment, healthy debate and robust discussion can quickly turn into a toxic stew. The conversation can get too intense and the tone too emotionally charged to allow for productive conversation. As a result, collaborations can become strained and important relationships may suffer lasting damage.

So how is a leader to keep today’s political heat from burning up the workplace? Here are three things you can do right away:

Make it clear: Thoughtful discussion is the rule. It should go without saying (but say it anyway) that all forms of workplace discussion are to be respectful and professional. Make it patently clear that your employees are to be courteous and thoughtful in every interaction—with one another, with customers, clients and business partners... across the board. Sometimes you simply have to state (and restate) the obvious.

Model the behavior you are looking for. If you tell your employees that respect is the rule—but then proceed to fiercely “have it out” with a colleague or publicly criticize a more junior employee—your words will quickly be dismissed as hypocrisy. Never lose sight of the fact that, as a leader, you set the bar, and people will be following your actions closely. Your actions set the stage for acceptable behavior across the organization.

Hold people to account. If you've got a team member who mistreats others—speaking disrespectfully, baiting, berating or bulldozing—you've got to put a stop to it at once. The fact is, your team can't operate efficiently or effectively without clear and trustworthy parameters for safe, productive dialogue and debate.

It's a simple formula: Create the right environment for productive dialogue, stand out as an exemplar of the behavior you're expecting, and tackle poor behavior head-on. These three steps are the key to a healthy workplace—one in which your employees speak openly, listen respectfully and work together to create stellar results.

About Dr. Liz

Dr. Liz Bywater has been called a one-of-a-kind leadership expert. Working at the intersection of business and psychology, she brings together pragmatic experience, advising top executives across the Fortune 500, with an advanced degree in Psychology and a dynamic personal style to inspire, engage and counsel her clients.

For more than a decade, top global organizations have requested Liz's help in resolving issues such as creating extraordinary client relationships, increasing market persuasion, and driving productive collaborations in an increasingly complex world.

Liz advises senior leaders at some of the world's most successful companies, including Johnson & Johnson, Nike, Thomson Reuters, Bristol-Myers Squibb, AmeriSourceBergen and more. She uses her expertise in human behavior to drive commercial success. She helps her clients propel innovation, exert influence and lead their organizations through change.

A thought leader in organizational excellence, Liz provides expert commentary for such publications as the Wall Street Journal, New York Times, Fast Company and USA Today. She is on the editorial advisory board for *Life Science Leader* magazine and is a featured expert on such radio broadcasts as CBS Philadelphia's *Philadelphia Agenda* with Brad Segall and *Woman of the Week* with Marilyn Russell.

Liz earned her PhD in Psychology at the Derner Institute for Advanced Psychological Studies at Adelphi University. Her undergraduate degree is from Cornell University, where she graduated Phi Beta Kappa and Cum Laude. She is a longstanding member of the American Psychological Association and the Society for the Advancement of Consulting. She lives in scenic Bucks County, PA, with her husband and two teenage children. Stay tuned for Liz's forthcoming book, *Slow Down to Speed Up!* (Business Expert Press, Fall 2017).



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Liz Bywater, PhD | Bywater Consulting Group, 1669 Edgewood Road, Yardley, PA 19067
www.bywaterconsultinggroup.com

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