

Embrace the Complexity in Your Team



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Resource Type: Risk eNews

Topic: General, Organizational Culture

Risk leaders often tell my team they frequently face resistance and resentment when new risk policies, activities, or requirements are announced. Who wouldn't be excited and energized by another rule to follow, exercise to complete, or hoop to jump through? Why shouldn't you expect to hear: "I was sitting here happily anticipating a risk-related request from you!"

Three Timely Tips

In his book *How to Work with Complicated People*, Ryan Leak offers simple, practical advice for dealing with wonderful humans who sometimes seem strangely complicated. Three pieces of advice from the book resonated with me as powerful tips for risk champions facing push back, skepticism, or sabotage.

First, resolve to become a *people person*. Not an extrovert (necessarily), but someone focused and committed to working with other people. Leak writes, "By people person, I simply mean you must become a student of people. An expert in humans. A teachable, growing individual who is curious about the nuances and flavors of humanity rather than feeling intimidated by them."

Next, embrace emotions. Leak explains that "Emotions are a normal part of being human, which means they should be a normal part of working together." Instead of getting irked when someone is annoyed (emotional!) about something at work, he urges us to listen without judgment. He explains: "If you can listen without judgment when someone vents, you'll gain their trust to help move forward when they've finished expressing themselves."

Last, resolve to develop and leverage your adaptability quotient (AQ): the ability to adjust to change in real time. Leak reminds us that honing our AQ positions us to "build a higher quantity and quality of bridges because you're not limited to just 'one type' of person and you don't need everyone to meet your expectations before you can start working together."

Reasonable, Simple, and Clear

During a recent speaking engagement, I shared the timeless advice from authors Tali Sharot and Cass R. Sunstein in their book *Look Again*: "Avoid making people skeptical of your work simply because they find it hard to process." When facing doubt, push back, or complaints about inadequate bandwidth in response to a request

, remember to ask:

- Is the timing of the request fair and reasonable? Am I asking someone to help me meet one of my deadlines that could jeopardize a priority of theirs?
- Have I framed the request in a manner that is clear and unambiguous? Is it simple?
- Is the “why” and “what’s in it for you” clear as well?
- Is the request or “ask” one my colleague will be able to easily do, or does it require reading wordy instructions?

The View from Over There

Too often we make requests of others that help us get our needs met, goals achieved, or projects wrapped up with a bow—without adequate consideration of how the request *feels* to the other person. One of Ryan Leak’s tips that is repeated—with powerful effect—throughout the book is, “What is it like to be you?” He reminds us that “Curiosity is always a better response than frustration, so reach for this question at the first sign of conflict or confusion.” When confounded by a colleague’s response, behavior, or lack of a response, pause to wonder: “What is it like to be you?”

At NRMC we frequently remind ourselves to lean into curiosity, which we believe is an accessible superpower for every risk professional. We love these question prompts to leverage curiosity:

- What am I missing?
- What assumptions am I making?
- What are the possible unintended consequences of this decision?
- Who would disagree with this conclusion, decision or action? Why?
- Whose unique perspective is missing from our conversation today?
- What if I’m wrong?

If you ask these questions before talking with your wonderfully complicated colleagues, your risk function will be more likely to flourish. Even if challenges remain, you’ll have better conversations!

Melanie Lockwood Herman is executive director of the Nonprofit Risk Management Center. During this year’s Risk Summit she will host a session called [“Risk Help Live”](#) where she will answer questions from the audience. As someone who leans into curiosity, Melanie is excited not knowing what those questions will be.