

Trust the Power of Awareness

By Paula Butterfield, PhD, PCC

Most of us grew up in the land of judgment, of right/wrong, good/bad, black/white, yes/no. *This coffee is great! That proposal is weak. Why can't you get this right? What's wrong with those guys in IT? I'm too soft/hard, forgiving/demanding, open/closed.* Judging is so much a part of our world that we don't even realize we're doing it. And even when we do realize, we don't know how to get beyond it.

Tim Gallwey, author of the *Inner Game of Work*,¹ offers the antidote in a wonderful story about AT&T telephone operators. Some AT&T managers asked him to help operators improve their "courtesy" ratings without increasing the time they spent per call. Gallwey agreed to work with the operators on two conditions: their participation in the program was *strictly voluntary* and the program did *not* have to be about courtesy. Reluctantly, the managers agreed.

Gallwey started by observing the operators at work. He discovered three things: the work was intensely boring; it was highly stressful since operators' productivity and courtesy were continually monitored; and it was so prescribed by supervisors and procedural requirements that operators felt treated like school children. So he proposed a program to reduce stress and boredom and to increase operators' enjoyment of their work. Yes, it was met with a lot of skepticism, especially by managers wanting improved courtesy ratings. But many operators signed up anyway.

He started the training by engaging operators in simple awareness exercises. First, he had them make distinctions about the caller based on the caller's tone of voice. Did they hear stress or irritation or warmth in the voice? Next, he had them practice altering their own voice qualities, like changing its pace or pitch.

When they put the two together, the real experiment began. They discovered that by altering the qualities of their own voice, they could influence how the caller was responding. Speaking through a smile could soften an angry caller. Matching the caller's pace could calm the latter's frustration. Merely listening and responding to the quality of a customer's voice gave the operators "a small but tangible impact on a great number of people."² The result? Courtesy ratings exceeded management's expectations, stress and boredom went down 40

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percent, and operator enjoyment went up 30 percent!

What happened here? Unlike the AT&T managers who hired him, Gallwey started with the assumption that telephone operators already *knew how to be courteous* but were in a system that interfered with its expression. All he did was find a way to help operators reconnect with their own wisdom.

Each one of us already has the experience we need to provide great service. We're all customers. We all make purchases, occasionally get lemons, want someone to appreciate our suffering, and resent the callousness we encounter daily with most customer service systems. We simply lose sight of it when we're on the operator's end of the phone or the manager's side of the hospital bed.

So if you want to nurture less stress, more adaptability, and greater service, here are some ways to put Gallwey's approach to work in your healthcare system.

- Look at the assumptions or beliefs you're working from. Gallwey began with two that were critical to his success: he believed that operators already knew how to be courteous and that his role was to help remove the obstacles standing in the way. What judgments do your beliefs and actions imply about the capabilities and motivation of your front-line providers? How might your own assumptions about who should do what prevent your staff from being courteous and sensitive to patient needs?
- Gallwey started by entering the operators' world with a desire to observe, listen and understand the current reality of their work life. He didn't assume he knew their work, so

he sought first to expand his own awareness. How often do you shadow providers or listen intently to caregivers in order to see and understand the work from their vantage point? When was the last time you spent a day doing rather than managing the work? What did you learn?

- Gallwey shifted operators' attention into the world of *nonjudgmental awareness* when he asked them simply to observe and describe voice qualities. As a result, they quit taking callers' moods personally, which opened them to more naturally helpful responses. So look for opportunities to nurture awareness in ways that disengage judgment. Invite staff simply to observe how patients respond when they [staff] say or do things differently. Or have them guess and log how long they think patients wait for different services or procedures, then compare their estimates with actual wait times.

The sheer act of paying attention to simple and relevant things disengages our judgment and re-engages our curious and creative spirit. Try practicing it for a few weeks. You'll likely be surprised at what you discover.

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1 Gallwey, W. Timothy. [2000]. *The Inner Game of Work: Focus, Learning, Pleasure and Mobility in the Workplace*. New York: Random House Trade Paperbacks.

2 Ibid, p. 38.

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Managing and Learning

By Dorothy (Dolly) Bellhouse

How do you learn? More specifically, how do you learn and develop mastery of a new management skill or a new management approach? On the personal side, how do you learn and develop competence in a new sport or a new game?

In management, a common approach is to intensely train a small selection of staff, who then serve as trainers for the rest of the organization. Think of how you learned total quality management or a service excellence approach. Certainly, six sigma relies on developing a cadre of master black belts to guide organizational improvement projects. This is a tried and true approach, but who really develops competence and mastery here? Does training alone actually impact management style?

Let's consider how you learn to play golf. You can read about golf to learn the rules of the game and even to understand the sport's psychology. You can take golf lessons to learn the basics, yet if you do not actually go out and play golf, you do not develop competence or mastery of the game. Consider the professional golfer.

He or she certainly has read and learned about golf, taken lessons, and – importantly – practiced. Yet, these players have coaches to constantly improve and refine their game and they actively consult their caddies as they play. "Well," you might say, "they're professional golfers. That's what they need to do to be successful." I agree.

How does this apply to healthcare management? I consider myself a professional manager, don't you? Yet, until recently, I never considered "practicing" a new management approach and I certainly did not seek out a teacher or a coach. But why not? Busyness was certainly a factor, yet my colleagues and I also believed that we were capable individuals and could get the training we needed and, as a team, could then support one another as we launched new initiatives.

Learning a new way to manage is like learning a new habit. Any of you who have tried to change your exercise routine and/or how you eat know it takes a while before the new behavior becomes a habit. In fact, you go through several stages:

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First, you're unconsciously incompetent. Essentially, you don't know what you don't know and you need to learn. (You need to "see" what you have or haven't been doing or eating.)

Then, as you practice, you are consciously incompetent. You notice every time you aren't applying your new knowledge and skills. (This can be discouraging and lead to reverting back to old behaviors unless you have a way to get yourself back on track.)

You then move to the consciously competent stage. You begin to develop your new habit, but you have to think about it a lot. (You realize that you're learning and you will make mistakes, but you are able to stay the course.)

Learning to improve your management approach requires practice and coaching. The "learning" of how to manage in order to adapt to our ever-changing healthcare environment must be coupled with "doing" the work of managing – just as professional golfers couple their learning and doing.

Toyota's rule for improvement as stated by Bowen and Spear, says, "...Improvement must be made in accordance with the scientific method, under the guidance of a teacher." This statement signifies one of the key differences between working adaptively using the main tenets of the Toyota Production System. Jeffrey Liker, in his book *The Toyota Way*, says that Toyota "builds people before they build cars." This applies to management as well as frontline workers. "Improvement must be made ... under the guidance of a teacher"¹ – very different from how most executives or management teams work.

So, as you and your management team consider how to make improvements in your organization to make care

more ideal for patients, consider how you will all learn to manage differently to support the changing work. You can serve as teachers for your directors and managers, but you will need your own teachers and guidance as you become consciously competent. While you develop mastery in your new habit of managing adaptively, your teacher will challenge you for further improvement.

Since healthcare is a complex, dynamic environment, we need to work adaptively. The continuing cycle of learning and improving is the essence of adaptive work and is the key to sustainable improvement. Adaptive work builds resiliency into the organization by building everyone's capability to respond to changes and adapt quickly.

I'll close with a "user" warning. This is hard work. Learning to do your work differently requires an open mind and the ability to recognize when your management behavior is part of the problem. You need to be comfortable with being a "freshman" again. You will need to recognize when you need help and ask for it from your teacher. I encourage you to start learning because your employees want to sustain improvements in order to make care ever more ideal for patients.

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¹ Spear, S. and Bowen, H.K. "The DNA of the Toyota Production System," Harvard Business Review, 1999, September-October.

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