

LESSON 6-3: Healthy Communication

Issue Processing

“Leadership is solving problems. The day soldiers stop bringing you their problems is the day you have stopped leading them. They have either lost confidence that you can help or concluded you do not care. Either case is a failure of leadership.” - Colin Powell

WELCOME & PRAYER

PREVIOUS LESSON FOLLOW UP

- In the last lesson, we asked you to go to three individuals and ask them the question, “What emotions do I display that inhibit our communication?” What were the results of your conversations?

LESSON

Select one or two of the scriptures below or another scripture that has recently spoken to you to begin the conversation with a spiritual component. Consider how these and other scripture relates to your business.

SCRIPTURE REFERENCES

- Proverbs 12:15
- Proverbs 11:14
- Proverbs 19:20
- Proverbs 15:22
- James 1:5
- Psalm 1:1-6
- 2 Timothy 3:16
- 1 Kings 12:6-19
- Proverbs 1:7
- Proverbs 4:13
- Proverbs 13:10
- Proverbs 24:6
- 1 Corinthians 15:33
- Hebrews 4:12

ISSUE PROCESSING OVERVIEW

Issue processing is a process by which your 210Leaders group will address one or more issues that your Members are dealing and desires assistance with. The goal is to have a safe and confidential environment where you can discuss your most challenging problems, and seek Godly counsel and wisdom in addressing those issues.

Issues to be processed could involve any number of items: business, professional development, personal growth, and quality of life. We want each of you to have wise counsel to help you be in control of your whole life, work and non-work.

Issue processing should be a structured and disciplined activity, so that Members who present an issue are assured that they will receive actionable feedback from other Participants. Issue

processing is intended as a comprehensive mechanism to “attack” all angles of an issue. It is intended to help participants seek godly wisdom and counsel from their own private “board of advisors.” Issue processing requires:

- “Care-frontation” - we challenge each other directly because we care.
- Questioning assumptions - we question assumptions and beliefs that drive behaviors and habits.
- Blind-spots, hot-spots and soft-spots - we shine a light into others’ blind-spots; and we help members cool down their emotional hot-spots and harden their soft-spots (and soften their hard-spots/sharp-edges).
- Group processing - we tap into the Godly, wise counsel of our group.

Each step has a proposed time component, but do not be constrained by this suggestion! If a step takes longer than suggested, that’s ok! If a step is finished before the suggested time, move on! The first several times your group engages in processing an issue, it may take longer than these suggested times as the group acclimates to this process. Thus, the given times are only guidelines - be flexible!

Also, when someone volunteers to have an issue processed, they necessarily make themselves vulnerable to the group. It is critically important that all Participants actively ask God and the Holy Spirit to give them wisdom and understanding (James 1:5) in this process. Use words and phrases that are intended to speak truth, but do so in a loving, caring way. While this may seem overly-simple, ask yourself: if Jesus was sitting here in this discussion, what questions would he ask and how would he ask them? And, what recommendations would he make, and how would he make them?

IDENTIFY POTENTIAL ISSUES (5 minutes)

The first step is to have the group self-select one or more issues (depending on time available) to process as a group. At the beginning of an issue processing session, the Facilitator asks the group if any Participant would like to identify an issue for potential processing. [It is helpful, but not required, if Participants complete the Issue Processing Form, available on website, in advance of your 210Leaders meeting.] Each Participant who identifies an issue for potential processing should do three things:

- (1) Describe and then identify the issue in the form of a question (“How do I...”).
- (2) Explain if the issue is:
 - a. a problem to be solved,
 - b. a decision to be made, or
 - c. an action plan to be developed.
- (3) Rank the issue as an “A”, “B” or “C” (*see below for ranking explanation*).

Ideally, the Facilitator will write the “issue” on a white board or large paper for all Participants to see. This allows the issue to be summarized succinctly into a phrase or concept, and to be ranked easily by putting the corresponding letter (A, B or C) next to it. (If a white board is not available, the Facilitator can write it down on a legal pad or similar method, and read the list back to the group before the first issue for processing is selected).

Rankings:

“A” stands for “Alligator.” An “Alligator” issue is one that has you by the throat; it is urgent AND important (think Stephen Covey’s urgent/important quad diagram). Imagine yourself caught in the jaw of an alligator in the midst of a “death roll”, where an alligator grabs its prey in its powerful jaws and tries to drown its victim in a violent rolling motion, making it unable to respond or make any defensive maneuvers or escape. In a word, these issues demand immediate attention, and are critical to your health, family, and/or business. They have to be addressed now, or the vitality of you or your business/work is at stake. An example of an Alligator issue could be that your company has 2 weeks of cash remaining, before being out of money and not being able to pay employees, pay vendors, etc.

“B” stands for “Bear.” Bear issues are usually large, looming problems, which are on the horizon. They are important, but not yet urgent. Unresolved, they may/likely will turn into an Alligator, but you (thankfully) have some breathing room before it gets that far. An example could be the pending retirement of a key employee who is critical to the business, and that person has not properly trained, or you have not hired, their successor.

“C” stands for “Crow.” A Crow issue is a loud, annoying problem that continually “pecks” at you. It’s like a crow on a power line that caws, flies down, pecks you, and flies off. Usually, these are not overly important - they are likely harmless, but they can often drain energy, focus and attention. These issues often make you think they are “urgent” or “important” but usually are neither. Addressing them will help your business/work, but they aren’t top priority items.

SELECT AN ISSUE (5 minutes)

Next, the group, as a whole is asked to reach a consensus as to which issue the group wants to address. The Rankings are intended to help the group prioritize issues, but that does not mean that “A” issues must be addressed over “B” or “C” issues - the group decides what issue to address first. Usually, groups will naturally discuss the issues presented for a brief period, and they may ask clarifying questions during this process. For example, a Participant may indicate that he/she is dealing with a similar issue, and would like to see another Participant’s issue addressed. Other times, one Participant may say that he/she has addressed the same or very similar issue to one that was identified, and will offer to meet with that Participant separately (over coffee, breakfast, lunch, etc.), to help that Participant address the issue, and if so, it can be removed from the master list.

The Mentor’s role is to *facilitate* the entire issue-processing session, including the selection of the issue to be processed. Help the group reach a consensus. Ultimately, the Participant must be willing (not be coerced or feel forced) to let the group process his/her issue. ***IT IS IMPORTANT THAT RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSION NOT BE MADE DURING THIS TIME.***

Once an issue is fully processed (when a Participant identifies his/her action steps described below), the group may want to select a second issue. In an hour and a half lesson, you should be able to process 2 issues. You can also abbreviate this process to deal with “C” issues.

PROCESS THE ISSUE (30-40 minutes)

There are 5 basic steps to issue processing:

1. The Participant provides additional information and identifies the help sought.
2. The other group members ask “Clarifying Questions.”
3. The Participant is given an opportunity to restate or further refine the issue.
4. The other group members suggest solutions/make recommendations.
5. The Participant repeats back what he/she heard, and identifies what he/she is going to do in response (and completes a Personal Action Summary).

STEP 1: PARTICIPANT EXPLAINS THE ISSUE MORE FULLY (5 minutes)

Once an issue is selected by the group for “processing”, the Participant selected provides additional information to the group. It is HIGHLY recommended that the presenting Participant complete several statements in further explaining the issue and identifying the wise counsel he/she seeks. Members should explain the issue by completing the following statements (see Issue Processing Form):

1. The issue/opportunity is ...
2. It is important because ...
3. My goal is ...
4. Relevant background information is ...
5. The options I have considered are ...
6. What I have done to date is ...
7. I am afraid that ...
8. The help I would like from the group is ...(the ideal outcome)

STEP 2: “CLARIFYING QUESTIONS” (10-15 minutes)

After the presentation to the group, members have an opportunity to ask questions and dig deeper into the issue. This is called “Clarifying Questions.” These questions dig below the surface and expose root causes or issues that the Participant may not have seen, it frequently results in new potential outcomes or actions. Frequently, issues presented are symptoms, rather than the root cause, of the issue. By asking clarifying questions, the group can better identify the root cause.

A word of warning: do not propose solutions or answers in your questions. Most leaders are very good at solving problems. As a result, it may be very difficult to ask a question without embedding an answer. However, at this point in the process, we are trying to learn about the issue, root causes and relevant/critical information by asking questions to make sure we have enough information before we propose a solution.

Clarifying Questions begin with words like: “why”, “what”, “who”, “how”, and “when”. They sometimes seek further explanation: “Explain to us”, or “Tell us more about ...”

Examples of Clarifying Questions:

- Why do you believe you are ready to hire a new COO?
- What are your quarterly short-term goals?
- What percentage of time do you spend on each of your major buckets? Can you break this down for me.
- By the end of the year, what's the most important thing you want to have in place?
- What did you mean when you said?
- Can you explain more about your staff training? It is one-time, or ongoing? Was it conceptual or specific? How is it designed?
- Tell us about your team-building (or other team-encouraging) activities?
- Explain the incentives in place for employees to?
- Do I understand that you want to ...[clarify the outcome desired]?

Remember, Clarify Questions are intended to help everyone learn about the issue, root causes and relevant/critical information by asking questions to make sure we have enough information before we propose a solution. They are not intended to pre-supposed solutions.

STEP 3: PARTICIPANT RESTATES OR FURTHER REFINES THE ISSUE. (2 minutes)

As Clarifying Questions are asked, the issue is often refined. The Participant may see that the “core” issue is not what he/she thought it was. The presenting Participant is thus asked if he/she would like to restate or further refine the issue. The goal is to have the person consider: am I still talking about the same issue that I originally identified, or is there a different issue/sub-issue that is really at stake? Give them a minute to restate the issue.

STEP 4: GROUP MAKES SUGGESTIONS/SOLUTIONS (5-8 minutes)

After the Participant has a chance to restate the issue, each group Member is given the opportunity to make suggestions and propose solution(s). (Proverbs 12:15; 11:14; 19:20-21; 15:22.)

As noted earlier, the “presenter” has made himself vulnerable to the group by allowing his issue to be processed. It is important that when making suggestions, all Participants actively pray for God and the Holy Spirit to give them wisdom and understanding (James 1:5), and to share truth in love. Before giving solutions, ask: how would Christ deliver this suggestion to this person? Give honest feedback that is respectful, loving and caring.

Each person (Participants and Mentors) are given an opportunity to identify solutions and/or suggestions. These should not be long, drawn out diatribes. Comments should not focus on prior behavior, failures, or actions by the presenter. Suggestion should ONLY focus on trying to help the presenter to see/understand the “core” issue, AND to identify potential solutions or actions the presenter can take to resolve and to address the core issue. Suggestions should be succinct statements or recommendations that focus on (1) the issue and (2) proposed action(s).

This feedback can take the form of suggestions, such as:

- “I heard you say.... And in my opinion, I think this is what you should do”

- “I think it is”
- “I think you’re missing..., and should consider...”
- “I think you should”

STEP 5: PERSONAL ACTION SUMMARY (5 minutes)

Finally, the presenter is asked to give a “personal action summary” of what he/she heard.

At this last step, the presenter should state (1) what he/she heard and (2) what actions he/she is going to take in response. The presenter is asked to immediately write down and record the action items (see Personal Action Summary available on website). Actions should be specific, be time-oriented (a date/time by when the action will be completed), and identify any other individuals who will be involved. Some examples are:

- Identify a personality assessment for all potential new hires, by December 1, 2016, and have HR Director NAME implement by December 15, 2016.
- Place a “help wanted” ad by November 30, 2016 in local newspapers. Get NAME to draft the ad by November 20, 2016.
- Do a cost analysis to hire an ongoing employee trainer by December 1, 2016, and made a decision regarding same by December 30, 2016.

[Your group may consider recording this step using an iPhone, iPad, etc. Email the recording to the Participant to listen to after the meeting.]

Sometimes, we may get defensive in this process, and we may think things like: “No, no, you don’t understand,” or “That won’t work because....” If you are a presenter, pray and ask for humility, ask for Truth and remember that others’ suggestions are made in love with a goal of helping, not attacking, you.

WEEKLY APPLICATION

For individual’s whose issue was evaluated by the group, please report on progress or conclusions after pondering the issue and potential solutions over the last two weeks.

CLOSING PRAYER