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Annoying Behaviors - or Name the Elephants in the Room

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Why it is okay to park a car in a no parking zone ten feet away from the entrance to a grocery store? Why it is okay for a newspaper to find its way onto a bus or into a restroom but seldom comes back out? Why it is okay for a driver to weave through traffic? Why it is okay for someone who works out at a gym to take an exercise ball, mat or other equipment and fail to return that equipment to the common area? For me, these are all examples of annoying behaviors.

Annoying behaviors can find their way into the workplace and if unchecked, they can wreak havoc. The challenge is to have a healthy enough organization where these behaviors and other tough issues can be exposed and rendered harmless without embarrassment or anger.

In a well functioning organization, no issue is too sensitive to be raised at a meeting, and no questions are off-limits—to include the annoying behaviors of peers and associates. If someone believes it important to address an issue or challenge someone's annoying behavior, it is not only all right to make that challenge, it is expected.

Given the following questions, rate your workgroup on a one to five scale. For the first two questions, one means "slow" and five means "fast." For the third question, one means "no" and five means "yes".

<i>Descriptions</i>	<i>Rating</i>				
1. How long does it take for conversations to get from inside people's heads to the coffee machine and then to meeting rooms?	1	2	3	4	5
2. How quickly are crises identified and bad news discussed?	1	2	3	4	5
3. Are there structures, incentives, and support for speaking the unspeakable?	1	2	3	4	5

Of course, the ideal is a quick response time and structures in place (the perfect score is 15). Does your group have room for improvement?

If you want to improve, the next time someone asks a hard question or raises difficult issues, ensure that people in authority provide some protective cover for that courageous individual to help keep the issue alive, even if the issue makes them or others in the room squirm with discomfort. In this way, crises are identified early on, long before they reach unmanageable proportions. In turn, people can establish rituals and procedures designed to ensure that the "elephants in the room" get acknowledged and discussed. The idea is to get hidden perspectives put on the table fairly quickly to enable people to solve tough issues, even those occasional annoying behaviors.

In my opinion, the faster your group can name the elephants in the room, the faster your group will learn to address and resolve tough issues—to include annoying behaviors—and the better your group problem solving and decision making skills.

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