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ENTERPRISERS
PROJECT

10 resources to make you a better communicator

Our IT leadership experts give their best communication advice for any workplace situation.

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How active listening can make you a better leader

By Mark Runyon

In today's digital workplace, listening can be harder than ever. We are continuously inundated with waves of information battling for our attention. Just as you're collecting your thoughts from one meeting, you're heading straight into the next.

Listening is one of the most powerful tools you possess as a leader. It helps you build trust and foster loyalty. It lets others know that they are important to you and that you value what they have to say.

Unfortunately, many leaders don't carry this awareness and never learned how to effectively listen. In fact, less than two percent of all professionals have had formal training to improve their listening skills.

How to be an active listener: 5 tips

As technology leaders, we need to embrace the practice of active listening. This practice centers around engaging with your employees to the point of being fully immersed in what they have to say. Our goal is to understand. When we make active listening part of our everyday routine, we build trust, loyalty, and strong relationships.

Let's look at the elements that go into active listening and explore how it can make you a more effective leader.

1. Silence the world

Every IT leader I know is insanely busy – it goes with the territory. But that frantic pace comes at a cost: It's difficult to be fully present and give another person your focus when your attention is frayed between multiple competing priorities.

When you let the world intrude on a conversation, you unconsciously tell the other person that they are less important than the things around them. Instead, with every interaction strive to make a connection and show people the respect they deserve. To do this, start by limiting distractions. That means closing your laptop, muting your phone, and parking work problems at the door so you can focus and engage with this person in this moment. Of the hundreds of things littering your calendar, is any one of them more important than leading your team?

2. Seek to understand before being understood

This concept comes from Stephen R. Covey's bestselling book, *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People*. At its essence, it means we should listen with purpose.

In our normal daily interactions, most of us are just waiting for our turn to talk – angling for an open space in the conversation where we can steer the discussion where we want it to go. But when we do this, we devalue what the other person is saying. We aren't truly hearing them. How can you help someone with their problem if you don't understand what their problem is?

It requires patience to listen with purpose. Break out of the cycle of formulating a response while the other person is still in mid-thought. Instead, take the time to listen to the undercurrent of what they are saying. People rarely share everything that's on their minds, but if you are mindful, you can usually read between the lines. It's not only their words that tell the story. What is their body language saying? What facial cues are you noticing? Seek to fully unpack what is going on so you can provide the empathy and support your employees need.

3. Show engagement

It's not enough simply to silence the world. Show the person that you are listening intently through your responses and body language: Make eye contact and provide brief verbal affirmations or nod, modulating the tone of your voice as well as mirroring their body mannerisms. Paraphrasing what the other person is saying can also be a helpful tool to show you understand or are seeking clarity. When you take time to validate what someone is saying, they will feel comfortable sharing more.

It's also important to ask powerful questions. These should be open-ended questions where you push the other party to dive deeper for greater understanding:

- "Why do you think that?"
- "How do you see that working?"
- "Can you expand on that point?"

Curiosity should fuel these questions, and each response should help you more clearly understand the problem or situation. Thoughtful questions show the other person that you are engaged in the discussion and open to hearing what they have to say. At the same time, read your audience and be mindful that some questions may push boundaries inappropriately. Be prepared to reshape or bail out of a question when necessary and assure the other person that it's okay not to pursue that path.

Thoughtful questions show the other person that you are engaged in the discussion and open to hearing what they have to say.

4. Free yourself of judgment

With active listening, it's critical that your employees feel free to speak their minds. To facilitate this, refrain from interrupting their train of thought, don't be too quick to offer advice, and leave judgment out of the conversation – these are surefire ways to shut down open and honest communication.

Interrupting signals to the other person that you aren't actually listening. It says, "I've already formed my opinion and I don't care what the rest of your thought is." Interruption breeds disengagement, which you must avoid. When you introduce judgment into the conversation, you discount the other person's style or approach. Just because someone doesn't think the way you do doesn't mean they are wrong – their point of view is just different from yours. When you embrace those differences, you can lead people where they are at instead of forcing them into a model you are comfortable with.

5. Nurture the habit

It's great to develop awareness around becoming an active listener, but the key is to put those measures into practice. This requires practicing active listening and forming new habits through your interactions with others.

For your next meeting, plan some ways to deliberately practice active listening techniques, and make a habit of asking powerful questions. If you find this difficult to do in real time, practice with friends or family before trying them in the workplace. The more ingrained these behaviors become, the more natural they will feel. Forming these new habits is key for long-term success with active listening.

According to Julian Treasure's TED Talk, we spend 60 percent of our time listening but only retain 25 percent of what we hear. Active listening can help you not only retain more

information but also better understand what is being said. It boosts your emotional intelligence and makes you a more empathetic leader.

Active listening enables you to better understand your employees' struggles and avoid misunderstandings. This in turn can help you identify issues before they become serious problems. Showing compassionate attention to your employees' needs helps you develop the necessary rapport, influence, and credibility to lead – and it's the right thing to do.

4 examples of successful IT leadership

By Vikas Gupta

IT departments have critical responsibilities in organizations, but the full scope of their role is often misunderstood. As [digital transformation](#) continues to be a priority in nearly all organizations, IT leaders must reevaluate what success looks like and how it can be achieved.

The C-suite should empower IT leaders to implement essential technology throughout their organizations in a way that is strategic, cost-effective, and serves employees and customers. Understanding how IT teams can have an impact across an organization is a good first step to begin executing effective technology acquisition strategies.

1. Improve internal communication

IT leaders are responsible for implementing technology and data infrastructure across an organization. This can include CIOs, CTOs, and increasingly, CDOs (Chief Data Officers). To do this effectively, IT teams need employee buy-in, illustrating clearly how new technology tools and project management can benefit the company's mission and goals. To achieve the full support of the employee base, IT teams must explain the implementation process and expected timeline.

While data platforms and cloud infrastructure are important, the table stakes are tools that allow for internal communication and collaboration. Many IT teams are leveraging business process management platforms (BPMs), which help enable better collaboration between remote and in-office teams, offering a shared view of projects. These platforms allow for greater visibility and communication across organizations while reducing meeting time and improving workflow efficiencies.

2. Employ automation, but do it strategically

Technology has the potential to increase productivity, provide greater visibility of projects for employees and managers, and automate tasks that are repetitive and time-consuming.

Enterprises often go wrong with automation by focusing too much on large-scale initiatives instead of starting small with process and project workflows.

Automation software and platforms can enhance employee experience and engagement by reducing burnout. By removing the need for employees to manually enter or organize large sets of data, for example, employees can focus on data analysis and making strategic decisions based on the outcomes. Automation also reduces the possibility of human error that is inherent to manual processes.

AI is increasingly underpinning intelligent automation across enterprises. However, it's easy to get caught up in the AI hype. Success means a true path to operationalizing AI. Enterprises often go wrong with automation by focusing too much on large-scale initiatives instead of starting small with process and project workflows that can be automated, which all add up to larger-scale success.

3. Bridge the gap between business and IT

The rise of low-code/no-code solutions has changed the game when it comes to freeing up resources and clearing IT bottlenecks. These technologies enable citizen developers to build applications for things like CRM, BMP, work management, and other mission-critical operations that have historically required IT and developer resources.

IT leaders in modern organizations must be willing to empower business users with the ability to build and manage so that "shadow IT" can become a thing of the past. However, successful implementation will always require that governance and guardrails are baked into the process from the start. IT leaders must also still be on hand to scale out more complex applications, especially those dependent on complex AI and data science.

4. Always think about the customer experience

While IT teams ensure that technology is being used effectively and securely across an organization, they should never lose sight of how such tools contribute to customer satisfaction. Many IT initiatives are enabling some kind of customer-facing experience, and IT

leaders can provide more individualized customer experience through the use of chatbots, apps, surveys, and email.

By using automated customer engagement technologies, employees can devote more time to higher-touch customer service. This is important, especially with big-ticket purchases like cars, appliances, and other consumer durables. Satisfied customers lead to happier employees, and this creates a cycle of success for businesses.

Above all, IT leaders should continually evaluate best practices. With a holistic approach that includes effective communication, automation technology, prioritization for operational efficiency, and customer experience, IT leaders have the opportunity to effect wide-sweeping changes and implement new technologies successfully.

Soft skills in IT: 10 CIOs share career advice

By Carla Rudder

What makes a great leader? Some of the most important and inspirational qualities have little to do with technology.

Recently, finalists in the 2022 [National CIO of the Year ORBIE Awards](#) each shared a piece of advice they had collected over their careers. We've rounded up the ten best quotes on soft skills below. Read on, or [download the complete quote book](#) for advice on leadership, soft skills, career development, strategy, and more.

IT career advice on soft skills

From the importance of authenticity to expressing gratitude, here are some memorable pieces of advice that have helped shape top leaders across a range of industries.

Show up

Bridget Collins, Chief Transformation Officer & CIO, Cerence: One of my uncles is a retired executive in the automotive business. When I was in college he told me, "Ninety percent of life is just showing up," and while I think the context was initially some form of encouragement to show up for class, that statement rings true many years later.

"Showing up" to me means being present – physically, and in today's world, even virtually. Show up to the conversation, the meeting, the challenges, even the successes. Bring your best. Be humble. Be inquisitive. Seek always to gain knowledge and expand your horizons. Recognize that you don't have all the answers, but you've shown up to learn from the collective knowledge in the room. Show up for your people. Your team, your coworkers, and even the conflicts that inevitably arise. Try to look at situations from others' perspectives. Support the employee or team member who may be struggling to find their place. Build relationships within your own team and encourage relationship-building across all functions. Recognize you all have a common goal, and challenges are just the scenery on the journey.

Showing up is leadership. And while that advice probably saved me a grade or two in college, it truly guided my career. I have been lucky to learn from many incredible colleagues, expand my knowledge of technology and business, and support many team members over the course of my career. I still have a lot to learn, so I plan to keep showing up.

Be your true self

Jeanine Charlton, SVP & CTDO, IT, Merchants Fleet: The piece of advice that I was given early on in my career that has stuck is "always be true to your authentic self" (and your authentic intelligence, voice, and passion).

When we are different people at work than we are at home, we may experience insecurity, anxiety, and burnout. We don't trust ourselves or our work because we are always performing – and daily performance is hard to maintain. When we are true to ourselves, we are better able to feel confident in our

participation at work. There is no hiding or shrinking into the shadows – we are authentic, living in the full expression of what we are capable of.

I had to work at not competing with others or comparing myself to an impossible ideal: My authentic voice was enough. The pandemic has accelerated digital transformation and emphasized the need for innovative voices in technology. There are more opportunities than ever before, but tech remains a space many women feel uncomfortable entering.

After spending my entire career in this field, I know it doesn't have to be this way. Women are invaluable assets to tech companies, with unique skills and perspectives that will only advance the progress we've made thus far. And while we may face discouraging statistics, we should not let them stop us from pursuing our passions. I learned to believe in the possibility of my success before I ever saw it come to fruition.

Be the message

Sue-Jean Lin, SVP & CITO (Chief Information and Transformation Officer), Alcon: "It's not about the slides your present, it's the story you tell."

This advice was shared with me more than two decades ago when I was a regional CFO. I had to learn what mattered wasn't just facts and figures, it was the way that I came across and how I said it. Storytelling is about delivering the message to the targeted audience with the right tone, attitude, and energy level. People's attention must be earned, and people's buy-in can't be taken for granted just because we got the facts right. To this day, I remind myself often, "We are the message."

Build relationships

BJ Moore, EVP & CIO, Providence: One piece of advice that has stuck with me over the years is around the importance of investing time and effort in building a solid professional network. Especially, building strong relationships during good times so that we have a way to lean on each other when times are hard or there is a crisis.

For me, this is one of the things I value most about ORBIE's recognition and the ability to be part of the amazing community of CIOs they gather across the country. I benefit greatly as I get to learn from others and build connections that will help us all.

Strive for an average, not a balance

Colleen Berube, CIO & SVP Operations, [Zendesk](#): Quite early in my career I was at an event where a woman CEO was speaking. When asked about how she managed being a CEO while raising her children, she shared that she thought of "work-life balance" as a batting average. Setting a goal of striking balance all the time is not realistic. Sometimes work will be demanding and require focus, and your family will need to support you. Other times you will need to focus on your family and work will have to give.

It's important to be honest with yourself and make conscious decisions in both work and life. By looking at my career through this lens, I have found that it gives me power and confidence in making those choices and makes the day-to-day work a lot more realistic, manageable, and meaningful.

Express gratitude

Christopher Desautel, SVP & CDO, [Berkshire Hathaway Homestate Companies](#): In my career, I have had the good fortune to learn from many great leaders. Their influence, in both words and actions, has helped shape the leader I am today.

One piece of advice, or perhaps a realization based upon many experiences, was the importance of gratitude and using two very powerful words: "Thank you."

This may sound trivial, yet these words give energy to others and are a force multiplier. In my experience, everyone has had help in achieving their success as a leader, regardless of their field of endeavor. There is no such thing as a self-made man or woman. Recognizing this, and ensuring you express your gratitude to the many individuals

who help you with an idea, a project, a new perspective, a late night of work, or even constructive criticism, is a key part of being an authentic leader.

A piece of advice that I have often passed on is "Every day, find someone to thank." They are there; you just need to look.

Rent talent

Rob Dickson, CIO, [Wichita Public Schools](#): Early in my leadership journey when considering hiring for a position, my mentor Mark Evans said to me, "You rent talent. Understanding that the person could give you three good years and go on is still success. It is better to grow leaders than to bog staff down so that you retain them."

I have held on to that conversation throughout my leadership journey; as a result, I have enjoyed watching my network of leadership grow as I see my staff do bigger and better things.

Smile and introduce yourself

Phillip Ventimiglia, Chief Innovation Officer, [Georgia State University](#): The most impactful advice I ever received is to smile and introduce myself when I walk into a room.

Early in my leadership journey, I was fortunate to have the opportunity to take a rigorous one-week leadership class. I was the youngest in the class by far, with seasoned leaders from every industry represented. The program utilized intensive, regular, honest feedback from your peers. Given I was young and relatively inexperienced, I was very quiet at the start as I was extremely intimidated. As such, I was shocked that the feedback from my peers was that they thought that I was calculating and manipulating when they initially met me because I was not talking. However, once they got to know me their feedback was the exact opposite.

When I returned from the week, my team said the same thing. They all said that when they first met me, they were afraid of me! From that experience, I learned to smile and introduce myself whenever I am in a new situation which has helped me tremendously to quickly build bonds with new teams and people. Today, I get extremely positive 360 feedback about my

approachability and ability to collaborate. That would not have happened if I received that tough but real feedback.

Be a giver

Shelia Anderson, EVP & CIO, Corporate Functions, [Liberty Mutual](#): Some of the best advice that I've ever received was from my dad, encouraging me to treat all people with dignity and respect, to focus on my abilities, and to be a giver, focusing on helping others.

This advice was given to this 13-year-old girl growing up in the South, where stereotypes and biases were rampant – not really encouraging girls to pursue higher education. This was a time when I was faced with my first significant obstacle, a scoliosis diagnosis, and was frankly focusing on how different my life would be, and on all of the things that I wouldn't be able to accomplish.

These imperfect moments have shaped me as a leader. This taught me to pivot my focus, be optimistic, get out of my comfort zone, and learn new skills. It also taught me to have empathy for others – as I experienced for a few years in my life what many with disabilities face for a lifetime.

I grew up in a lower-middle-class family, with deep values focused on serving others – how you show up in the lives of those around you matters. I believe that giving returns to you as a 10X factor. My legacy will be a builder of people, their careers, and exceptional teams, yielding exceptional business results. The connection and authentic leadership lead to higher engagement overall. I spend considerable time focused on coaching, mentoring, and investing in the next generation of our global and diverse workforce, leveraging and sharing these life lessons along the journey.

Culture and values matter

Robin Brown, CIO, Protein North America, [Cargill](#): When I was early in my career, I was given a great piece of advice from a leader I looked up to and had such respect for. His advice was "Be your authentic self at all times."

Always be confident in who you are and what you stand for. We all encounter situations where we are challenged and sometimes it can be very uncomfortable. But it's in those situations we have to remember to lean in, be curious, and ask educated questions to provide a different perspective.

Your voice matters, so use your voice and stand up for what's right, even when it's not the popular stance. You will always feel good about the outcome when you stick to the facts, keep emotions out of it, present the best version of you and never stray from your values.

Culture and values are incredibly important. Culture starts with your leadership and the example you set for your teams. Commit to the culture you want and be intentional in setting expectations for your team. When something changes and your values no longer line up with the culture, you have a decision to change the culture or move on to a new opportunity. But never change your values!

Handling difficult workplace conversations: 7 tips

By Roberta Matuson

Does the mere thought of addressing a challenging work situation with one of your employees fill you with anxiety and distract you from other work?

If so, you're not alone. According to workplace resource firm [Bravely](#), at least 70 percent of employees are avoiding difficult conversations with their boss, colleagues, or direct reports. And workplace health is suffering as a result.

Here are 7 tips for handling difficult conversations at work:

1. Get clear on your objectives

The first step in addressing any difficult work conversation is clarity around what you'd like to achieve from it.

For example, let's say you need to talk with an employee whose performance is subpar. Are you talking because you want to help them improve their performance, or are you going through the steps so you can transition them out of the organization? Those two scenarios involve two very different conversations, so it's essential to get clear on what you want to happen at the end of the conversation before you start.

2. Organize your thoughts

Most people who enter difficult conversations without a clear roadmap wind up doing more damage than good. Leaders blurt out things they quickly regret saying, or they find themselves going in circles without an exit plan.

In my book, [Can We Talk? Seven Principles for Managing Difficult Conversations at Work](#), I discuss the need to go into these types of conversations with a well-thought-out outline. I also recommend taking your notes into the meeting to help keep you on course.

3. Practice your lines

How you say something is equally as important as what you say, especially if you're in senior leadership. The higher up you go in the organization, the higher the expectations are regarding your performance.

Take a few moments and practice your opening lines in front of a mirror. Or, if you're fortunate enough to have a trusted peer or a coach, ask them to role-play with you until you're comfortable saying what needs to be said.

4. Listen deeply

Most people are so keen on getting a difficult conversation over with that they charge through the exchange. In doing so, they miss a big opportunity to build a solid relationship with the other person.

If you slow down the conversation and listen deeply to what the other party has to say, you'll stand a much better chance of moving forward together rather than moving further apart.

5. Get a date on the calendar

The quickest way to stop avoiding a difficult conversation at work is to schedule a date for your meeting. With today's technology, it's simple to book an appointment.

The clock starts to tick the moment a get-together is booked on the calendar, which is exactly what is needed to catapult procrastinators into action.

The quickest way to stop avoiding a difficult conversation at work is to schedule a date for your meeting.

6. Expect the unexpected

I've coached enough leaders on handling challenging work conversations to know that things don't always go as planned.

An employee may break down in tears while describing a personal matter that you were not aware of. Or a distraught team member may get up in the middle of the meeting and leave. These things happen, which is why it's essential to plan for the unexpected. Be prepared to pause and reschedule a difficult conversation, as time for both parties to collect themselves may be what's needed.

7. End the conversation on the right foot

Before closing out the conversation, it's always good to confirm the other person's understanding. Asking someone to tell you their knowledge of what just transpired can be very helpful.

If you're telling them that they need to be more of a team player and they think you're talking about improving their tennis game, you're on different courts. At that point, you can say, "Okay, I probably wasn't clear enough; let me be specific and tell you exactly what I need you to do."

Difficult work conversations are inevitable. The sooner you get comfortable with them, the more confident you'll feel as a leader.

How to deal with a toxic boss: 7 tips

By Drew Bird

When I tell people what I do for a living, they often respond, "My boss needs your help – they are a complete psycho."

In reality, that's probably not true: Psychopathy in the general population is around 1 in 100. The chances that your Network Systems Manager at the data center is a psychopath are pretty unlikely. But if you are working for someone who behaves in a bullying, combative, or otherwise toxic way, the impact on you can be devastating.

So what can you do about it? Here are some suggestions that can help you cope with a bad boss.

1. Make the decision to stay or go

The first step in dealing with a toxic boss is to make a realistic decision about whether to stay or go. If you feel trapped, realistically evaluate how severely the situation is impacting you emotionally and mentally. If you decide to stay, it's important to develop some coping mechanisms to limit the effect of their behavior on your mental well-being.

Others will notice your professionalism despite poor leadership.

2. Do the work: Don't be a target

If you decide to stay, avoid being a target – or by extension, a victim. You might think that means keeping your head down and staying out of trouble (which can be necessary), but it can also mean just the opposite. Do your work – and do it well. Consider going as far as you can to help your boss succeed (but that doesn't mean you have to suck up to them). It will

make you less of a target, and others will notice your professionalism despite poor leadership – and trust me, you won't be the only one to notice that.

Yes, you might help your boss appear better in the eyes of his/her superiors, and maybe they'll even get promoted as a result. But if they get promoted away from you, that may not be such a bad thing.

3. Don't get drawn in

Toxic people love to pull you into their drama. Don't fall for it.

Stay a safe emotional distance away from them. Be polite, honest, and clear. Maintaining a safe emotional distance means that you are insulating yourself from them by not letting their negative behaviors or actions negatively impact you while you continue to work in a professional and functional way.

They may find this frustrating at first, but by keeping things 'strictly professional,' it leaves them with little room to maneuver and get under your skin. Work to treat them as just another aspect of your workplace – no worse than the printer that constantly jams or the terrible coffee from the vending machine.

4. Don't gossip

To help keep your sanity intact, distance yourself from the source. That means seeing the toxic person as separate and distinct from you.

You may not like or respect them, but don't disparage them. Speaking positively of others – or at least resisting the temptation to speak negatively – is a strong demonstration of emotional intelligence. If you do need to vent, do it outside the workplace.

If your colleagues are also being negatively affected, you can lend support by offering an understanding ear, but make sure any discussions don't devolve into negativity or personal attacks. If you feel like there is a legitimate case for bullying, intimidation, or harassment, consider getting HR involved ... which brings us to my next point.

If your colleagues are also being negatively affected, offer support but make sure any discussions don't devolve into personal attacks.

5. Keep detailed records

If you find yourself the target of inappropriate or abusive behavior, keep detailed, accurate records – and don't embellish.

There may come a point when you are asked to corroborate a complaint – either your own or someone else's. Either way, your ability to make concrete, detailed references to your personal experiences will significantly support your case.

Vague references, unsubstantiated anecdotes, hearsay, or third-party opinions do little to move a complaint forward. Proving a pattern of toxic behavior through verifiable documentation will strengthen your case. Without detailed and accurate records, you are unlikely to get very far.

6. Don't derail your career

The last thing you want to do, or allow to be done to you, is to have your career derailed. This means doing your job to the best of your ability, and not giving the toxic leader the means or reason to start making you a target.

I've seen the employee come out on the losing end of that situation and end up as persona non grata as a result.

This might mean you have to bite your tongue. It may also mean you have to do work – or redo work – that you don't think needs to be done. The secret here is to basically keep your head down, stay out of trouble, and wait the situation out. I have had people push back on me on this point saying that people should be able to speak out and against poor treatment by their immediate manager. I agree with this completely, and I often encourage people to do that when they have a strong and valid case. But speaking out against something like subjective standards of work, or a manager's "style" of leadership are hard cases to make, and the actions taken against the dysfunctional manager are often minor or non-existent.

I've seen the employee come out on the losing end of that situation and end up as persona non grata as a result. In worst cases, I've seen promotions blocked and educational opportunities withheld or withdrawn. Take a long-term view here. As I discussed in point No. 1, you must make a stay/go decision for yourself, and if you decide to stay, then you may have to put up with some questionable situations.

7. Remember, it's not forever

For many toxic leaders, the lure of more power, prestige, and control means that they move positions frequently, so you may not need to deal with the toxicity for long. While you wait them out, focus on developing your skills and your network so you can find a new position if necessary.

One final note: You're not alone if you're wondering why organizations tolerate toxic people in their leadership ranks. The problem is these types of dysfunctional leaders are often very adept at projecting a successful image upwards in the organization. The can be well-versed in political maneuvering, glossing over or blaming others for past mistakes, and manipulating people's emotions.

During the hiring process, a charming and engaging candidate can easily pull the wool over the eyes of less than experienced hiring manager. By the time they are safely in the organization and past the probation period, its often too late to easily do anything about their behavior. I hope you never have to work for a manager like this, but if you do, hopefully these steps will help.

Workplace culture: 4 ways to foster healthy conflict

By Eric Freshour

Believe it or not, disagreeing with your colleagues can [be a good thing](#).

Especially as CIOs and IT departments begin to rethink the way they interact with IT and business, the idea that conflict is unproductive and detrimental to workplace culture – and the notion that organizations should avoid conflict entirely – is based on a false premise: that all conflicts are unhealthy and unproductive.

That claim falls flat when we broaden our perspective on what the term "conflict" encompasses.

Healthy conflict allows room for treating people with respect, listening to others' ideas, and considering those ideas during collaborative, iterative, and agile processes. Maintaining a [diversity of thought and experience is crucial](#) to building a healthy, fair, and inclusive company culture.

How to foster healthy conflict in the workplace

Here's how IT leaders and technologists have traditionally handled conflict – and four ways to build a strong culture that fosters healthy conflicts and more productive ideation and solutioning processes.

1. Collaboratively set expectations between IT and the business

A recurring theme with IT leaders is an "us vs. them" mentality regarding the rest of the organization – specifically business counterparts. It can happen when either party fails to understand the value that the other provides.

For example, IT teams often work in silos. At the same time, business leadership might spin up shadow IT teams – which lack explicit IT department approval and detract from the enterprise IT strategy – to get around what they see as hurdles. This is a recipe for redundant labor and organizational dysfunction.

Contributing to the conflict is the fact that many companies consider IT a cost center and an internal service provider to the business and its customers. That sets the stage for a transactional dynamic rather than a collaborative one.

To reframe that relationship, work with stakeholders to set expectations and define what success looks like from the beginning – whether it be with leadership, internal employees, third-party vendors, or customers.

Start by outlining and defining product goals – requirements gathering, key design decisions, what constitutes a finished product, training preparation, and ongoing support – so that the business understands what the work entails. IT leaders can then establish points where bringing key business stakeholders into the process will enable the most productive outcomes.

2. Seek continuous feedback instead of avoiding conflict

IT teams and leaders should open an ongoing dialogue with the business and other stakeholders. That means being willing to receive feedback from multiple constituencies during different project stages rather than simply handing over a "finished" product as a protective measure. While critiques may introduce conflict and discomfort, they can help drive the relationship between IT and the business forward and enhance the products and services that IT is providing.

The agile methodology for project management, which emphasizes speed and constant iteration, embodies this approach. As part of regular planning and retrospectives, agile methods suggest that team members highlight three areas for improvement based on their

previous "sprint," a short period wherein a development team works to meet particular milestones.

Encourage everyone to broaden their purview and grapple with other areas of improvement head-on – acknowledging that no single individual 'owns' the challenges they face.

Some team members may be tempted to flag their work for improvement to avoid the conflict of criticizing others. Instead, encourage everyone to broaden their purview and grapple with other areas of improvement head-on – acknowledging that no single individual "owns" the challenges they face. Continuously improving and delivering the best IT products and services is a team effort.

3. Change how feedback is delivered to avoid finger-pointing

Leaders in an unhealthy company culture often put people on the spot for their mistakes. This is natural (if adversarial): People tend to focus on individuals since they are tangible and often at the center of your attention, whereas organizational challenges are abstract and invisible in a meeting or conversation.

Instead, stress the difference between individuals and problems, delivering feedback cordially and professionally without assigning blame. It's more complicated than it sounds – but it's a skill that can be learned. As a leader, you may need training and [upskilling](#), especially if you plan on working with product teams that could persist for years.

Give your employees ample lead time to not only offer up critique but also identify potential solutions. This ensures that feedback is not couched in negativity or a personal attack – this, in turn, spurs healthy conflict and practical recommendations for improvement.

4. Create a culture of open communication and collaboration

When it comes to significant roadblocks that may not have a clear resolution – such as critical design decisions or budget trade-offs – CIOs often lean on conflict-reducing measures that can spur more wariness and distrust among employees. Some of these tactics include blind votes on crucial IT issues or decisions made by executives behind closed doors.

Discussing decisions openly is a better way to build trust and strong working relationships. This approach invites an opportunity for team members to better understand the decision-

making process and why key decisions were made. IT leaders, team members, and potentially even employees from other areas of the business can discuss why they support one option versus the other, what value levers they might pull to help a project meet its goals, and which option aligns best with the company's strategy and key performance indicators (KPIs).

Also, consider scheduling stand-up meetings based on modeled leader behavior where team members talk about their shortcomings over the previous month – including why they fell short and what they would have done better. Leaders typically kick off these conversations, admitting from the outset that they aren't perfect, which can inspire others to open up about their own opportunities for improvement.

There is a difference between animosity and conflict. A healthy workplace culture invites productive conflict and iterative improvement. Conflict enables CIOs and their team members to quickly identify value creation levers and operate more effectively within an agile or digital process model.

When collaborators assume good intent in others and embrace conflict as a way to solve their most challenging problems, they are more likely to drive better business results, lower operating costs, and increase productivity.

How to be a smart contrarian in IT

By Todd Deshane

Some people enjoy being contrary to get attention or resist authority – and every once in a while, they're right. Being a smart contrarian, however, requires effort and thought. And for IT leaders, thinking like a contrarian can lead to greater innovation.

4 smart contrarian approaches to conventional wisdoms

Here are four ways to take a contrarian approach in a smart, thoughtful way.

1. Conventional wisdom: To innovate, you must come up with something new.

Smart contrarian: You can innovate on the process of well-understood technology stacks.

There are plenty of companies chasing the next big thing – be it quantum computing, blockchain, or the metaverse. And while innovation can lead to huge gains, you can still innovate in established technology areas.

For example, cloud computing, high-performance computing, and machine learning (including applied narrow and wide artificial intelligence) are well-understood stacks, yet there is still room to innovate. The development and deployment pipelines and improving processes can be unexpected game-changers in that they can allow professionals in different areas to solve problems without having to learn the full technology stack.

If an expert in manufacturing or finance can use a cloud-enabled supercomputer to solve machine-learning problems in a way that they understand, for example, the world can move forward faster as experts in other fields innovate similarly.

2. Conventional wisdom: To keep up, you must be busy all the time.

Smart contrarian: You can be productive and deliver results without being constantly busy.

We all know someone whose calendar is often double- or triple-booked, who's in constant demand for meetings and consults, and is always busy delivering for clients, collaborating with hot business units, and innovating on the cutting edge of their specific field. Maybe that even describes you.

All these efforts aren't truly productive, however, if you don't have time to think clearly and consider where you can make the greatest impact. Quality suffers and you can't bring your best self to solve the most important problems.

How can you overcome this challenge? When you ask the right questions, you can figure out what drives the most value, what is most needed and will drive the most impact – and perhaps more importantly, what is *not* needed at the moment.

Schedule time for reflection. Have conversations with colleagues and friends who know you best. What motivates you? What comes easier to you than to your colleagues? Maybe your unique value is at the intersection of several unrelated (or unexpectedly related) disciplines. You won't discover these insights if you don't take the time to explore, reflect, and talk to others.

3. Conventional wisdom: Project management is mostly overhead.

Smart contrarian: You can leverage project management so that it's not overhead.

You've probably felt the pain of working on a project that is slowed by either too much or too little project management. Despite the many development methods, best practices, and tools available in software development, for example, too often we find ourselves stuck in endless meetings, struggling with constantly shifting scopes and timelines, and appeasing increasingly impatient clients – with no end in sight.

Don't over-engineer a solution to a problem that nobody cares about. Let your customers lead you to what matters and do just enough engineering from there.

How can you improve the experience and its outcomes? By asking the right questions to the right people at the right time. Instead of getting caught up in pet projects and initiatives, step back and consider whether you are doing things in the most efficient way. When you frame things correctly, you can save time and avoid over-engineering by clarifying what is most useful.

The key is to make sure you are solving problems that your stakeholders care about. As technologists, we can see the beauty in technical solutions for their own sake, but do these technical solutions provide the right value?

Start with the end user or the most important stakeholders: Do they find the end results intriguing? Have you built a proof-of-concept solution that tests your hypotheses? Can they get some value and provide you with quality feedback from a minimal viable product (MVP)?

Don't over-engineer a solution to a problem that nobody cares about. Let your customers lead you to what matters and do just enough engineering from there. You'll still need to add standard enterprise features such as security, user experience, and scale, but the goal is to add them to a product your client wants and values.

4. Conventional wisdom: Much communication is just overhead.

Smart contrarian: You can get great value from communication.

Have you ever spent hours or days solving a problem, only to have a colleague show you a much quicker, easier approach?

Asking the right questions can be just as important as having the right skills. Engaging the right people at the right time will give you a better picture of what people really want, saving you time in design and development. Start with the customer or the most important stakeholders: Can you talk directly to them to understand their needs? Can you talk to someone who already knows what they want?

Before you try to solve a problem, find out if anyone on your team or at your company has already solved that problem or has experience with it. Explore wikis and forums to see if solutions have been documented privately or publicly.

Too often, we fail to ask questions because we don't want to appear uninformed or unintelligent. Keep in mind that most people enjoy being asked for advice and would welcome the opportunity to answer a question, especially early in the process when they can help you save time and effort. Also, asking the right questions shows your colleagues that you can think through problems and may be able to solve them more creatively.

Have the confidence to go against conventional wisdom in the right ways. You will become a more creative problem solver and a smarter, more thoughtful contrarian.

4 tips for building connections in a disconnected workplace

By Andrew Lau

In the early months of the pandemic, enterprises made quick decisions to maintain operations while protecting the health of their employees. New work-from-home policies made it possible for employees to stay connected, and this flexibility delivered unexpected benefits by allowing businesses to engage new employees in remote locations.

But while most enterprises have maintained or even increased productivity, the transition to remote work has proven challenging for relationship-building, networking, and company culture. Separated by thousands of miles and countless Zoom meetings, employees – particularly those in the early stages of their careers – have struggled to build connections in the disconnected workplace.

However, some best practices can reduce the metaphorical distance between remote employees. Here are four ways you can build connections within your workplace.

1. Equip your teams with the right tools

Distributed teams can now choose from hundreds of communication, collaboration, and productivity tools. Every enterprise has its unique processes and requirements, so there is no single best tool that can meet the needs of every company.

To improve remote employees' teamwork and collaboration, analyze how your employees work and choose the tools that best meet those needs. A Slack or Teams channel could be the easiest way for some teams to facilitate asynchronous communication. For others, regular Zoom meetings could be the better choice to make crucial decisions together in real-time.

The goal should be to find the right combination of tools that supports your team's unique style rather than try to adapt to the wrong solution.

2. Ensure your employees enjoy the work they're doing

Employees must first connect to their work to connect to each other. Foster this connection by communicating the purpose and value of each project while simultaneously providing employees with the space they need to work and grow. Instead of devoting time to micromanaging each task, check in with your employees to ensure they're excited and challenged by their work. If they're not, prioritize finding a new project or switching employee tasks to ensure everyone is engaged.

3. Trust your employees to meet their goals

One of the goals of every enterprise should be to foster a culture of collaboration and entrepreneurship, and the best way to achieve this is to lead by example. Demonstrate a willingness to communicate and collaborate across the organization and build this collaboration on a foundation of trust.

One of the goals of every enterprise should be to foster a culture of collaboration and entrepreneurship, and the best way to achieve this is to lead by example.

Every employee at your enterprise was hired for a reason, and they must be able to trust and rely on their coworkers to meet their goals and move the business forward. In an organization where everyone can count on each other to pull their weight, it becomes easier to build connections and relationships within and across teams.

These relationships lead to long-term creativity and success: some close coworkers could develop a new product or service that will take the business to the next level or even go on to found a startup.

4. Make time for connections

For most enterprises, the transition to remote work didn't disrupt the significant aspects of their operations or the work that keeps their business moving. Instead, small moments of growth and collaboration were lost: the minor issues or questions that don't merit interrupting a Zoom call or sending a specific email.

These minor issues could be addressed quickly in person through a simple question or conversation. Still, the physical distance of remote work makes it more difficult to find these organic moments of collaboration.

To compensate for this loss of connection, institute processes or policies that make it clear to employees that they have time and space to bring up their questions or comments. Whether it's company-wide virtual happy hours, dedicated Zoom meetings for small queries, or a virtual open-door policy for employees to connect with their managers, making time for these small interactions allows employees to take a more informal approach to growth and relationship building.

Hybrid work will look different for every organization. Rather than prescribing the "best" tools and approaches for remote work, consider how you can create the environment and culture that will allow your employees to do good work, build relationships, and take pride in their workplace. Establish the proper foundation, and the rest will follow.

4 tips to make meetings more meaningful

By Carla Rudder

Between one-on-ones, coaching sessions, strategy meetings, town halls, and company-wide forums, IT leaders' calendars can get filled up quickly, leaving little to no time to think before joining the next video meeting.

But meetings are important – for those working remotely, it can be the only time in their day they see and connect with their peers. In a hybrid work era, leaders must take steps to rethink meetings to keep the benefits, minimize time-wasting activities, and preserve time in the day to get work done.

We asked IT leaders who recently won a [2022 Seattle CIO of the Year ORBIE Award](#) what they have learned over their careers about making meetings more meaningful and effective. Here are four tried and true tips you can use to reclaim some time in your calendar.

1. Cap meetings at 30 minutes

Zafar Chaudry, SVP, CDO & CIO, [Seattle Children's](#): The pandemic has driven us to reconsider how we work effectively; engaging staff is very different now due to hybrid working. My view on meetings has always been that they should be kept short, on point, and focus on quick fact-based decision-making.

For any person, it is hard to concentrate beyond 30 minutes at a time, so my goal is always to keep meetings to 30 minutes and report out by exception only. No one wants to attend a meeting just to hear a report out. They want to hear the highs and the lows and what actual decisions need to be made.

2. Practice intentionality

Margaret Hopkins, SVP & CIO, [Puget Sound Energy](#): With so many meetings and so little "think time," I'm often amazed that we accomplish anything in IT. All kidding aside, I've learned over the years that the key to dealing with the endless barrage of meetings is to be intentional with my time – especially in this new hybrid working model.

Virtual meetings are now the norm, and technology is central to our workday. With that comes multitasking and distractions – email, chat, emojis, document-sharing, and white-boarding, among other disruptions like the dog barking, doorbell ringing, and the kids asking for help – all things that can make it hard to focus during a time when we simply don't have time to waste.

To combat multitasking and distraction, keep your meetings succinct and focused, and give your audience 100 percent of you: Close every window except your video meeting, use headphones to reduce background noise, and keep your video on (even if you just finished a workout).

Intentionality takes practice, but you'll be amazed at the results when you're not multitasking –maybe you'll have more productive meetings, or maybe you'll get even more done in this fast-paced IT world.

3. Focus on decision-making

Sasi Pillay, VP of IT Services & CIO, Washington State University: Avoid meeting if it is only for information exchange. More collaborative tools, such as email and chat, do a far better job of keeping people informed. If it is to make a decision, I prefer to have a meeting with the people who are the appropriate stakeholders.

Have a clear agenda with a purpose for each item sent out prior to the meeting to help people to prepare. The purpose could be stated as a discussion, a decision, or both. Establish a time limit for each agenda item, and if the stated purpose cannot be achieved within the time allocated, put it in a parking lot for another meeting or even an email, if sufficient progress was made during the meeting.

4. Keep meetings important, relevant, and fun

Jason Wood, CIO, EvergreenHealth: Get the subject matter right. Ensure that the team meetings have a purpose and that the content is important and relevant.

We do this in our monthly all-hands meetings by not only spending significant time selecting what content the leadership wants to share, but also in understanding what the broader team wants to hear about. We send anonymous surveys to every teammate, ensuring that each question and suggestion is addressed in the meeting. This serves the purpose of aligning our content to what teammates want to hear about and it also offers those shy teammates a voice in the meetings.

Furthermore, we are adamant about creating space for dialog and relationship building. Simple information dissemination can be solved with an email – we strive for our meetings to be something greater.

The shift to hybrid has renewed my belief that meetings are an opportunity to build relationships and strengthen the culture. We used to build relationships by walking to Starbucks or running across the street for lunch. For most of my teammates, being in the office five days a week is a relic of the past. For those remote teammates, virtual meetings are the only interaction points with the broader team. Hence, we make a strong effort to create space in meetings for fun interactions and collaborations.

7 'stay interview' questions to gauge employee satisfaction

By Mark Runyon

One of the most valuable things to come out of The Great Resignation has been a refocus on people. As leaders, we need to show up for our people every day. We need to understand their concerns. We should show appreciation and help them feel valued. We must be present.

Stay interviews are an excellent tool for understanding our people. Exit interviews help us discover why people are leaving. Stay interviews help us determine where people find value in the organization and why they may be inching towards the door. They are an invaluable tool to implement continuous improvement and show people that their voice matters.

I'll admit the name "stay interview" is a little wonky. If I heard it as a direct report, I might think, "Should I consider leaving?" Instead, shape the conversation as "I'd love to get your perspective on a few important topics to help me serve you better." Lead by clarifying the benefit to the employee.

Honest feedback is critical for stay interviews to be successful. Create a safe space where people feel comfortable speaking their minds without fear of reprisal. Be prepared to be vulnerable. It's tough hearing about areas where you aren't effective and the organization is falling short, but it's essential to have these conversations.

What to ask during a stay interview

Let's examine seven powerful questions to get the most out of your stay interviews.

1. What talents do you have that aren't being used in your current role?

Even your all-star software developer doesn't necessarily dream in code. People are dynamic. Everyone has interests that go beyond their core competency. Many like to nudge the boundaries of their comfort zone to develop new skills. This is how we grow. When people are underutilized, they may feel the itch to explore outside options that allow them to maximize their career development.

2. How would you like to be recognized?

During a recent check-in, a team member said, "I enjoy being recognized for the things I'm doing, but I never want to be called out for it at a company meeting."

This interaction was a great reminder that people want to be recognized – but in their own way. Gary Chapman discusses in his book, The 5 Love Languages, that we all need love, but each of us receives it differently based on our unique needs.

Explicitly ask people how they prefer to be recognized and adhere to that. A revealing follow-up question: "Do you feel we regularly show appreciation for all the great things you do?"

3. Do you feel we provide professional growth opportunities in the areas you want to grow?

At Improving, we offer a buffet of options for professional development, from one-on-one coaching and certification study groups to leadership training and soft skill workshops. Some people take advantage of these offerings; others don't. Just because leadership sees value in these efforts doesn't mean everyone shares that view.

Always explore how your development offerings fit the needs of your people. Search out the learning gaps your people are starving for and work to fill them.

4. What does our organization do well?

A few months ago, I attended an internal leadership meeting in which we evaluated our culture and initiatives. While I value our leadership team's feedback, the exercise ultimately felt hollow since we weren't asking our most important stakeholders how they felt.

Your employees' opinions are the ones that matter, and this question asks that. What are you doing that resonates with your people and sets you apart? Why do these people stay when others have left? It's beneficial to know where things are working well so you can build on that.

5. If you were a manager for a day, what would you change?

This asks your people to imagine a more perfect organization. What pain points would they focus on solving?

Some will be obvious (salary increases, better health care), but others may be more minor things that don't often show up on your radar. For thornier issues, I find it helpful to lead with transparency and talk through why that change is so challenging. For doable things, ask them to walk you through how they see that change being implemented. Imagine the power of your people seeing positive organizational change based on their feedback.

Imagine the power of your people seeing positive organizational change based on their feedback.

6. What would you like to see me, as your organizational leader, do more or less of?

This asks your interviewee to assess you. How are you as a manager? Where are you missing the mark? Where do they feel you need to adjust your approach?

This is a vulnerable place, and you need to receive feedback appropriately. If you react defensively, you'll tarnish trust, and your employee will likely revert to telling you what you want to hear. Don't scare away the honesty you are trying to draw out.

7. Jump ahead in your career three to five years. Where do you see yourself?

I'd tack on, "It's ok if we are not in that vision."

A few years ago, one of our people mentioned during an exit interview he was leaving us to go to a firm that specialized in security. While security is part of every project we deliver, our pipeline of pure security projects isn't overflowing. We are actively looking to solidify that side of the business through acquisition, opening up the possibilities he was craving.

Would that have changed his mind had he known that? Maybe not. But sharing the roadmap of where we are headed could have shown him that his dream was part of our future.

The key is finding ways to open up possibilities people may not realize are there. (Granted, if he'd said his dream was to start a goat farm, we couldn't have helped him, but I'd be super curious about what motivated that newly discovered passion.)

Stay interviews are pointless without follow-through. Follow-through should start at that moment by explaining why certain things are done. These conversations should spark exploration among leadership to determine which changes make sense. It's essential to let your interviewees know you'll follow up with them and when. If you fail to follow through, your employees won't feel heard or valued.

The Great Resignation is ongoing. According to [Willis Towers Watson's recent survey](#), 53 percent of employees today are job seekers. As talks of recession grow louder, job shuffling could give way to a greater desire for job security. Regardless, it's essential to focus on putting people first. Stay interviews should be a staple leadership tool to deepen your understanding and awareness of what is important to your people.

Hybrid work: 9 ways to encourage healthy team conflict

By Stephanie Overby

Long-distance relationships are hard.

That's as true in working situations as it is in our personal lives. When you're talking about relationships within a [hybrid work](#) team, with some employees working remotely and others in the office, maintaining good relations can be even trickier.

"When everyone isn't in the same room, or office for that matter, it can be easier for communication to break down," says [Dr. Sunni Lampasso](#), executive coach and founder of [Shaping Success](#). "Hence, having a mixture of in-office and remote workers can create increased miscommunication and conflict avoidance opportunities."

Conflict is inevitable whenever human beings are working together. But managing it in a healthy way is not only essential to a positive workplace environment but also important to reaping the benefits of differing points of view.

Avoiding conflict can lead to decreased productivity, dysfunctional relationships, and increased turnover.

"Managing conflict is an essential communication skill in the workplace that helps build relationships, solve problems, and create cohesive teams," Lampasso explains. "Conversely, avoiding conflict can lead to decreased productivity, dysfunctional relationships, and increased turnover."

How to encourage healthy conflict

For many IT leaders, managing the hybrid team is a new experience altogether. And refereeing disagreements at a distance is a challenge. But there are actions they can take to encourage healthy conflict and resolution and make sure everyone is fighting fair.

1. Recognize the upside of disagreements

The teams that get along the best aren't always the best performers. "Without conflict we can't get to strong commitments on our teams," says Jeanet Wade, business consultant and author of The Human Team: So, You Created a Team But People Showed Up! "The 'storming' always happens before the 'norming' and 'performing'. We get stronger outcomes if everyone contributes and collaborates. This will require sharing opinions, knowledge and skills that can challenge the team."

2. Encourage differing points of view

Diversity of thought leads to better solutions in the end. "Leaders of high-performing teams consistently convey the importance of conflict and push the team to engage in constructive debate, even to the point that the tension makes team members uncomfortable, to generate the best decisions," says Andy Atkins, practice leader at BTS Boston.

This can be trickier in the hybrid world. "It is more difficult to gauge team members' reactions, or test the temperature in the room, and it is easier for team members themselves to withdraw from the conversation," says Atkins. Therefore, leaders must be more deliberate in creating a culture that encourages speaking up.

The most successful leaders not only model the willingness to face conflict themselves, but also help team members express their own points of view. "It helps if the team leader takes care to reserve his or her own observations in discussions to allow others to speak first, and to deliberately draw out different opinions around the table before moving on," says Atkins. "This is particularly important in teams where one or a few tend to dominate the discussion, and when the team is remote."

3. Create an atmosphere of trust

Data from more than 1,000 senior executives who took the Bates Executive Presence Index leadership feedback survey looked at whether were statistically significant differences

between leaders who led high-performing teams and those who had difficulties leading a high-performing team. The differentiating characteristics of high-performing team leaders boil down to two critical themes, according to analysis of the data: conflict and trust.

"Healthy conflict and debate are central to creating and leading a high-performing team, to allow for the airing of diverse views and constructive debate, and ultimately collaborating on the best, most innovative, insightful solution," says Atkins. The secret ingredient to constructive conflict is trust. "Leaders of high-performing teams keep the conflict constructive by delivering an environment of trust and safety to speak up and be heard. Team members tolerate the tension and respond productively because they believe the leader has the greater good in mind."

4. Set ground rules ahead of time

Conflicts in remote work and hybrid environments aren't really that much different than in-person. "They simply require more time and attention," says Wade. It's helpful to set expectations about acceptable behavior that the whole team understands. Some might include: always assume the best intentions, be clear when bringing up a new idea, and prepare audiences for tough conversations.

5. Resist the urge to avoid conflicts that arise

It may feel easier to skip over dealing with issues when you're working remotely. But that's a big mistake. "Avoiding conflict can fuel feelings of anger and resentment. Here are some tips to encourage conflict resolution," says Lampasso. "Don't avoid it – accept and acknowledge the other person's feelings, regardless of whether or not you agree."

6. Focus on ideas, not individuals

 To keep conflict constructive, leaders need to help limit the emotionality of debate and foster an exchange of ideas. This, again, they can model. "Staying calm and not getting swept up into the emotions is important, as is helping others on the team keep calm and focused," says Atkins. "It helps when the leader takes clear steps to communicate their acceptance of varied perspectives and opinions, and to inject focus if things are getting heated or off-topic."

IT leaders may also consider coaching others on how to do this. "This two-pronged approach of meeting facilitation and individual coaching can set an example and provide clarity and

specificity for team members to understand what to do differently to keep debate vigorous but civil," Atkins explains.

7. Practice active listening

Whenever there is some discord, each person involved should be allowed to express their feelings without interruption, Lampasso advises. Therefore, it's critical to practice or encourage active listening, whereby the one party fully listens to the other person and then summarizes what they've said.

8. Model empathy and vulnerability

Understanding others' perspectives is a foundational element of emotional intelligence and a critical skill when encouraging and managing healthy conflict in the hybrid workplace. Likewise, vulnerability goes a long way. "Admitting mistakes shows that you are human, which can help you earn credibility and respect," Lampasso says.

9. Know when to table the debate

As important as it is to foster healthy conflict, it's also critical to know when to put an issue to bed. "Leaders of high-performing teams are able to identify the juncture at which the discussion has raised a sufficient range of ideas, opinions, and challenges, and they help to guide the team along the path to a decision," says Atkins of BTS Boston. "This means stepping in if the team is succumbing to analysis paralysis or staying mired in the weeds of a debate. Ensure the team has done their research, and prepared well for the conversation, and then take the step to prompt and support their taking intelligent risks when it's time."