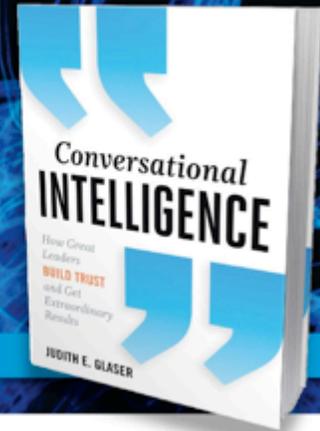


# Neuro-Tips

*Leadership and Success*



## *What Shapes Culture?*

Five monkeys were put in a cage with a ladder that held a bowl of bananas. One monkey ran up the ladder to try to get a banana. Before he could reach the top of the ladder, he along with the other four monkeys were sprayed with cold water. Another monkey then tried to do the same, and yet again all monkeys were sprayed with water. After a few times, the monkeys knew not to go up the ladder for the bananas.

Once this behavior was established, one of the monkeys was removed and a new monkey was switched in. The new monkey, not knowing that the pursuit of bananas resulted in being hosed, tried to run up the ladder. The other monkeys seeing this stopped the new monkey and beat him up. The new monkey now knew that running up the ladder to the bananas would get him beat up, but not that the group got hosed. As a result, the new monkey did not try to go up the ladder. Once again another monkey was replaced and once again was beaten up when he tried to go up the ladder.

Slowly, all of the monkeys were replaced and still no one went up the ladder and none of them knew the original reason. What this shows is that actions/traditions can persist even when situations and consequences change. While in the animal kingdom such traditions might prove useful, in the cut-throat world of business, this can cause stagnation and the use of outdated practices in the face of new problems.

The most common way that practices remain entrenched is because they are passed on from employee to employee. When utilizing an informal peer to peer training system, you run the risk of passing along valuable skills in a lax manner with a “just because” justification.

## Now What?

In order to avoid this, empower your employees. Make it so that this peer-to-peer training is seen as being a “stretch role” and the opportunity to train incoming employees is given to employees who are currently excelling at their jobs. Then formalize the structure of the trainings so that there is a specific agenda that the employees have to go through and justify why things are done in a certain way. In addition to this standardizing the training you are giving your incoming employees, you are also empowering your current employees and making them vested in bringing the new employees up to speed. Furthermore, you should have

### Neuro-Tip:

a “check-point” with your new employees one, three, and six months into the role to see not only how they are doing at their new roles but also what they think of the way things are done. New people, like the new monkeys, will try to go up the ladder for the bananas – they will ask **why**. This **why** is important and should be encouraged as it will allow you to assess which practices are out of date and which prove inefficient in the face of new demands.

- In a larger department, where this could prove to be too large of a time commitment, a comments box is a simple way to get new ideas or find flaws in current practices while allowing your employees to maintain their anonymity.
- Another more formal way would be to implement an annual “innovation challenge,” where employees get into groups and come up with ideas to better the firm with the best idea being collectively voted upon and implemented. Not only does this provide incentive to people in your department/company, but you are also getting ideas on how to fix processes from the people who do them the most.

Source: Stephenson, G. R. (1967). In: Starek, D., Schneider, R., and Kuhn, H. J. (eds.), Progress in Primatology, Stuttgart: Fischer pp. 279-288.

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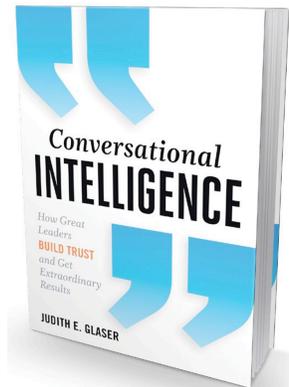
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