



Always Assume Positive Intent

I am currently working on a re-branding initiative with an organization. Because we are working with very short timelines with a large amount of work to be completed, a steering committee with decision making authority was put into place to shepherd the process. This group is responsible for developing and implementing strategies. To ensure that this group doesn't implement tactics that are not congruent with the needs of the target market, an advisory panel was also put into place to obtain feedback and input before moving forward with implementation.

As with most organizations, this team is moving at the speed of light in order to meet the deadlines and deliver the end result on time and within budget. As a result, right or wrong, that sometimes means that they don't always adhere to some of the best practices that help team members to communicate and work together effectively.

For example, recently the steering committee put together a recommendation that was subsequently routed to the advisory panel. Unfortunately, the document was not edited very carefully or with the target market view point in mind. In addition, steps were not taken to bring the target market advisory panel up to speed with conversations that had already taken place. As a result, one member of the advisory panel was needlessly offended by a bullet point contained in the two page document. This escalated and created numerous challenges costing the company both time and money in terms of lost productivity and missed deadlines.

So what can we learn from this example?

1. Think carefully about what you put down on paper or say out loud. Whether as an individual or as part of a group, it is your responsibility to ensure that your thoughts and ideas are accurately captured and conveyed.
2. Try to read or listen to the words from the perspective of your audience. Are you saying anything that might prove offensive? If in doubt, then rework your material until you think it fits the audience.
3. Provide the context and background for the information you are presenting whether written or verbal. This information could prove pivotal in providing just the right insight and or understanding necessary for your audience to process the information you are sharing with them.

That brings me to my final point. If you are on the receiving end, always assume positive intent. Seem obvious to you? If you answered yes, then you are in the minority. As pressures mount and people become stressed, they are more inclined to think that something was done purposely and with ill intent. And, unfortunately, some people will take your message personally and assume there is a hidden agenda.

Next time you feel offended when someone sends out a communication or says something that you feel is off base, take a step back, talk to the person, and most

importantly, assume positive intent. This will probably save you a lot of time and wasted energy, and during the process, you just might be pleasantly surprised by what you learn.

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