

REALITY-BASED LEADERSHIP

Ego Bypass Tool

THINKING INSIDE-THE-BOX EXERCISE

Most of the solutions we are called upon to provide on a daily basis involve finding a way forward given competing priorities or limited resources. After having been encouraged to “think outside the box” for many years, you may have come to overuse this competency or use it at inappropriate times. The time for thinking outside the box is during strategic-planning efforts or business-process reengineering efforts.

Consistently ignoring your organization’s constraints and providing “out of the box” thinking in problem-solving efforts is a big mistake. You will come to be seen as “pie in the sky” or out-of-touch with reality.

Instead of thinking about all the things that shouldn’t be happening or thinking of the ideal situation for you, recognize and accept your company’s goals and constraints (such as frozen headcount or limited funding) and think inside that box. The constraints are real – wishing them away won’t help – but you can propose solutions that address them while also serving your goals. Again, think in terms of “and,” not “or.” By doing this, you will be offering real solutions that respect the very real constraints you currently face.

POWER OF “AND” EXERCISE

When you can see that employees are wishing away their current reality and need to be able to imagine ways they could achieve their goals given their constraints, try this step-by-step exercise with them, moving them from a sense of lack and impossibility, to focusing on solutions.

- Identify the goal or goals.
- Identify the constraints or competing needs.
- Box it out.
- Replace “or” with “and.”
- Problem-solve.

Think of decisions as investments. You put time and energy into them – and sometimes money, too. The more you invest in making a decision, the more likely it is that you will make the best-possible decision. But sometimes the difference between the best-possible decision and the worst-possible decision is not very great, or the stakes in the decision are not very high. In such a case, you certainly do not want to invest much in the choice.