
HOW TO CANDOR

Ever wonder why some groups seem to make progress quickly, not becoming bogged down in unhelpful process or bad attitude?



They've learned to employ candor.

CANDOR IS...

Candor is open and frank expression of thoughts and feelings. It doesn't project or receive things personally and is unconcerned with "being right" or "jockeying for position". Candor simply fleshes out collective understanding through freely sharing questions, comments, affirmations and critiques. It often produces diversity of thought.

Space for everyone to contribute and sensitivity to shifts in mood correlate to a culture of candor and respect.

Candor is everyone's responsibility, whether you are the receptionist or the COO, a veteran executive or the new kid on the block. Candor is cultural. It is not a tool to be used and then put away but maintained through trust and relationship.

A group at MIT conducted a study to better understand collective intelligence for creative problem-solving and what they found directly correlates to candor. The groups that were most adept at solving problems displayed three main attributes: space and time for everyone to speak and contribute, sensitivity to the shifts in mood of individuals and the group, and the involvement of women in predominantly male groups which resulted in diversity of perspectives.

1. Space and time for everyone to contribute gives all regardless of position, hierarchy or level of intelligence the opportunity to share their thoughts and experiences with the group. 2. Sensitivity to mood is an empathetic skill necessary to be respectfully and constructively candid. 3. Inclusion of diverse perspectives allows everyone to see the topic or situation through a new lens.

HOW TO CANDOR

Imagine you are in a meeting discussing anything, e.g. updating the bathroom décor. There are many opportunities to share information gathered from your own knowledge and experience that may benefit the discussion at hand. However, there are personal dynamics at play causing you to smother your potential contributions. Should you share this information? What will so and so think? Or, how will the boss respond? What should be a simple task—choosing between talking fish heads for the men's restroom—has become a minefield of personal and professional proportions.

Building a culture of candor requires trust and good relationship.

Imagine a different meeting. This one is more important. Your boss has called a meeting to discuss new commission structures and she's asking for "honest feedback." You are saying to yourself, "It's a trap! How can I be sure she really means it?" Now, imagine she has presented every slide in her deck and confessed she's not sure how to overcome the current deficit and is asking for everyone's thoughts and ideas. Now you are thinking, "Well, this is different. She's asking for help. She's being vulnerable."

Your boss is not concerned with saving face. She needs help. Suddenly you realize there's a place in this meeting for your thoughts and ideas. Transparency has the tendency to level the playing field and assures others that you are on equal footing.

Once initiated in this way candor takes on a respectful and collaborative tone. I can disagree, agree or remain ambivalent in the conversation and know the folks in the room will welcome my participation. Sharing my candid thoughts helps others share their thoughts and their thoughts about my thoughts. Get this going at a good rate and you can have full-blown collaboration. Plus, get the added bonus of everyone feeling heard and appreciated.

HINDRANCES

According to decades of research, the single biggest hindrance to a culture of candor is fear of retaliation from superiors. This makes complete sense when an employee is considering career



longevity, compensation increases or even the emotional satisfaction of a job well done. In these situations we tend to take on a “keep the peace” or “don’t say anything” posture which results in colleagues distancing themselves from the teams and the work being done. Fear of retaliation exists where trust has been broken and only leadership can repair that breach.

However, candor is not simply about upward communication. It is also necessary between colleagues which leads to two other hindrances: one is termed by researchers as the “mum” effect and the other involves loss of control.

The “mum” effect is the reluctance to convey negative information because of the relational discomfort involved. This may seem as simple as not wanting to hurt someone’s feelings but is more accurately a by-product of ill-defined or shallow relationships. Think this through. If you really know your colleague, have taken the time to understand and build trust, then you are more able and likely to convey open and frank thoughts. You probably have an open door for candid conversation.

Lastly, loss of control includes potential outcomes such as colleagues getting the credit for ideas and work, appearing incapable or lacking, or simply having to compromise. Giving up control at least to the point of letting others be a part of the work is healthy and necessary. Imagine having the mind and resources of multiple people from multiple walks of life weighing in on your project. It’s like having a think tank at your disposal.

With a trustworthy team, teammates should be free from the fear of not getting recognized for their contributions or being judged incapable or unfit because they have questions or comments that are not held by the majority.

The “relational rub” is a valuable revealer of true thoughts and feelings and should not be avoided.

RELATIONAL RUB

What happens when everyone feels heard and appreciated? Everyone knows they can share their thoughts and opinions again and again. This may sound like a recipe for disaster with anyone spewing their opinion at every meeting but once trust and vulnerability are established, folks will candor respectfully. Sure, hiccups occur. There is always that one person that will over-share in the conference room, boardroom and bathroom, but candor can respond to that person with a, “hey, I think you’re oversharing,” then everyone gets a chance to develop.

This leads us, in conclusion, to a very important by-product of candor. I call it the “relational rub”. It’s that thing that happens when people relate to each other. So and so gets on my nerves; she’s always disagreeing with everything. Or, he’s always poking holes in my plans. Fill in the blank.

The relational rub is an outcome to having to bend and compromise. It may be uncomfortable but not always negative. In fact, when harnessed, it’s an indicator of the health of relationships and a valuable revealer of true thoughts and feelings. If my boss or colleague rubs me the wrong way, revealing something valuable and we still find a path to a great conclusion or progress then the relational rub has served its purpose.