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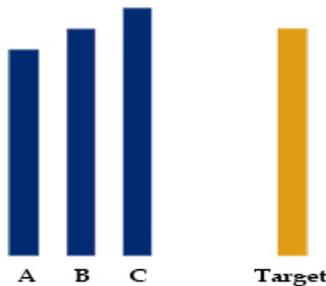
Do You Know If Your Employees Feel Safe Enough to Tell The Truth

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The Blue Collar University Podcast

Do Your Employees Feel Safe Enough to Tell the Truth?

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... a large multi-national construction company. He was in one of the training sessions where I
... periment to make a point about whether or not people are willing to disagree with their

leadership and tell the truth.

Our story today is about two training sessions. The first one was where I was working with an executive team of eleven, and the second one was where we worked with that companies entire management and supervision staff of 60 people.

On the afternoon before the big session, all of the Executives were seated around a long conference table.

On the screen was a slide with four vertical bars. Three of them were on the left side of the screen and were labeled A, B, and C. Each bar had a different height. On the right was a fourth bar marked Target and it was very obviously the same height as B.

A few days before the workshop I asked the CEO to pick a few members of the executive team. We swore them to secrecy and gave them these instructions:

When I ask which bar the target matches your answer is A. No matter what I say, no matter what I do, your answer is A.

We'll start with Chris, the CEO, and he'll thoughtfully answer "A". Then he'll choose the next in line and so on. Each of you responds A. Do NOT tell anyone else about this.

During the session, Chris and the four men and women he has chosen to know about the secret all answered A.

As we went around the large conference table, you could read the body language of those not in on the secret. Some people held themselves so still, you couldn't see them breathe. They didn't blink. They tried not to show any signs that they were confused, disagreed, or wondering whether their leaders had completely lost their minds.

But in trying not to send signals, they were screaming, "I can't believe I'm agreeing with them!"

Their leaders were leaders for a reason, right? They had to be right. It had to be A. The smartest, most powerful people in the room were saying the correct answer is A.

Surely it must be.

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Eventually, we got to the tenth team member, Glen. We could tell that Glen was nervous. He'd been shifting in his seat and clenching and unclenching his fists. At one point I thought he was going to snap his pencil in half.

When I asked him for his answer, Glen stammered, "I might get fired for saying this, but I don't agree with you."

He continued in a shaky voice, "The answer is not A. You almost had me believing it is. But it is not A. It is B."

Imagine everyone's relief when we told them what the exercise was about. You could feel the room come alive as people remembered to breathe again and began laughing and chatting about the exercise.

The next day the leadership training session included the executive team and the rest of the managers and supervisors, a total of over 60 people.

The slide went up on the screen. I asked which bar matched the target bar. Chris answered, "A" and then the next executive answered "A" in turn. All eleven execs said 'A'. After they finished we opened the question up to the room. People were staring at the slide in disbelief. They didn't look at the leadership, they didn't look at their buddy sitting next to them. They looked at me with eyes that asked, "Are you freaking kidding me right now?"

They stared at the slide willing it to tell the truth. No one spoke up so I chose people at random. All agreed that 'A' was the correct answer. Somewhere around six minutes into this, a young woman made a move that caught my attention. She was slowly raising her left hand, her right hand pushing her left elbow up as if her muscles weren't responding.

I said. "Yes, Malin?"

She raised her chin, stood up, squared her shoulders, and said, "I might get fired for saying this, but I don't agree with you. The answer is B."

At this point, one of the best moments I have ever witnessed in a training session happened.

Chris, the CEO, stood up and said, "You're right! It is not A. It *is* B!"

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nd the room and said, "The point of this exercise is to show you that even if the leadership
on an answer we can all be wrong. We need you to step up and tell the truth as you see it!"

Killer thought – people were afraid of losing their jobs when all we were talking about were four bars on a slide with no meaning whatsoever!

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