



## TIPS FOR ENGAGING MORE EFFECTIVELY

### More tips!

1. Acknowledge that difference of opinion is likely – diversity of thinking has great value, provided that people are able to express their differences in productive ways. This is how Severini put it: “Do you disagree with someone in the group? That’s cool too. We are all grown ups here. Just tee up your comments respectfully”.
2. Contributing to a conversation already underway can feel threatening – whether online or face-to-face. The advice in the invitation was to think of the discussion thread like that at a dinner party. Recognise that different people are listening and talking. Some are switching between the different conversations. So, it’s helpful to be aware of the different kinds of engagement.
3. Any conversation is likely to benefit from a mindset of respect, appreciation and curiosity. This includes considering what has already been said and finding ways of building on prior discussions – rather than just providing opinions that don’t seem to link with anything that has gone before.

### *Inspired to contribute*

It recently dropped rather inconspicuously into the Inbox, in the same way as dozens of emails do on a daily basis. It was a generically addressed email, so already registering much lower on the ‘need to read’ radar. But, since it came from a subscribed LinkedIn group, it didn’t fall into the same ‘delete without reading’ category. That befits regular spam which deviously, and only occasionally, makes its way past reasonably robust spam filters.

The email was titled “Invitation to a New Year’s resolution – 10 tips to engage more successfully”. It was posted to a change management forum on LinkedIn by community moderator, Gail Severini. The focus of the email (post) wasn’t on the art of engagement, but rather on how to engage more effectively with the particular LinkedIn group.

Even though change is an important topic, occasionally reading some of the threads is a bit of a luxury. Actually taking the time to process and prepare a post is a rarity. Yet, within a few minutes, the item was read and a response posted online. It was a busy day, and there were other tasks to complete – but the message was so compelling that it elicited an immediate, albeit fairly quick response.

How did that happen? Undoubtedly, because Severini’s message was framed in a way that passed the ultimate (and initially unconscious) test of authenticity. The success of the message prompted a closer look for elements that might usefully be applied to future communication aimed at engaging people.

### *What prompted action?*

First, the title included an invitation to contribute; to be more engaged in the online community. Instead of launching into telling subscribers why they should be more involved in ‘their’ community, there was a simple but powerful ‘invitation’ to contribute.

Evocatively, it then made an offer of ‘10 tips to engage more successfully’. That offer of assistance to make a better contribution added a sense of credibility to the initial invitation. They genuinely do want contributions! The offer simultaneously tapped into another powerful influencer of action, reciprocity. Those useful tips were deserving of some response in return.

Put together, a sincere offer to participate, and a list of tips judged a ‘gift’ of some value, cut through everything else in the moment. It earned a response. Yes, the response was appropriately brief, in the circumstances. But, more importantly, compared with hundreds - even thousands - of similarly generic-natured messages received over time, it achieved its purpose of prompting action.

### *Other motivators from that email*

Other elements in the email undoubtedly also contributed to its effectiveness. These comprised both the actual ‘tips to engage’ that were offered as well as the much more subtle way in which they were presented.

The post started off by welcoming people to 2015, followed up immediately by thanks for their participation in the forum – usefully that covered not only those who contributed directly but also the many more who might only read the forum.

Fresh from that message of inclusion, Severini then reminded people that the forum is “probably the largest global group of change management practitioners and enthusiasts”. Adding that this comprised around 54,000 members gave clarity to the relative importance of the group. Social proof is a powerful motivator and Severini had tapped into it before even sharing a single tip!

The first tip highlights that, while the group may be large, the forum is about quality. That is described as quality of collaborations, conversations and sharing. Those are definitely desirable attributes for such a forum and reinforced its potential value. Note also how, by stating the positive, it was also declaring what kind of behaviour wasn’t acceptable. A lack of certainty around actions expected is often a reason for underperformance in organisations.

Building on the sense of community, Severini then mentions “we are delighted to see old friends participating”, before providing Tip #2. The tip itself reminds people that some ‘celebrities’ in the field are part of the group. More great social proof while tapping into another effective influencing factor, expertise. And then, in pretty much the very next sentence, an important reminder that everyone’s included: “Don’t be daunted though – there’s no preferential treatment – we are all on the journey helping organisations be more successful in change”. How could you not want to be part of this forum, whatever your level of experience?

The post then moves to the specifics of making a contribution – intended at helping people move from reading only to contributing. It asks people whether they’ve commented before and what’s holding them back. The first call to action is “Maybe dip a toe in this year?” This could be too abstract for a project change manager, but the underlying principle is nevertheless worthy of consideration. ‘Dipping a toe in’ is easy enough for anyone. Vitality, the invitation is also action-oriented, following on with specific prompts on ways to act e.g. how to ‘like’ a post, how post a question and how to comment.

Using just one technique could help you craft more persuasive messaging. Why not have a go?