



Management and Performance Associates – September 2011

Yes, but...

As the story goes, he was a middle aged man, with an average body-type, living on the fifth floor of a nine floor building. He was neither extremely smart, nor stupid, his hair was gray, and he always wore dark glasses. When asked about his position in the company, he would not hesitate before answering “middle management.” He was the “middle office” supervisor and spent the day between Sales and Delivery. Those who knew him would say that his performance was so-so. His team – definitely – considered him to be a bad manager. Every time someone interacted with him, every time someone proposed an idea, a point of view or suggestion, the answer would always be: yes, but...

You probably know this character. It could be your boss, a staff member, your life partner, or even yourself. We spend the day dealing with people who do not listen as well as putting up barriers that prevent us from understanding the other. There are many excuses for that behavior, “it is just an expression,” “I don’t even listen to myself when I say it,” “Who says that? Not me...” As sad as it sounds, we--especially those of us who are living life version 2.0--have lost the right configuration and have stopped listening. We just respond.

Very often, in our training and development workshops we see the archetypes of this situation. Peers who are trying to close a negotiation and reply to each other with “yes, but, please see that...”

Salespeople that shoot “Of course, but...” every time a client questions the price, quality or delivery terms.

Staff members who respond “Yes, boss..., but don’t forget that...” to each of the comments they receive from their managers.

Hours and hours dedicated to justification, leading to miscommunication, mutual dissatisfaction and frustration.

What are some possible causes?

- We take the other person’s comment as a **personal attack**, instead of thinking that they may be lacking information.
- We consider our point of view “**the**” **point of view**, without appreciating a fresh perspective. This new way of looking at the situation might surprise us, and it could be an even better way than ours.
- **Immaturity and fear** that others will think we don’t know how to solve a problem, when in reality, the world is not in the hands of the “know it all.” Much better to find support in the synergistic collaboration of ideas.

Let’s see some ideas to get rid of our “buts”:

- **Be aware**

As “but” connects the second part of a phrase with the first one, once it is out, it immediately contradicts the initial statement. When we listen to “I like your idea, a lot, but why don’t you think about...” we immediately translate it as “*it is time you start thinking like me.*”

- **Take a deep breath**

As you finish the first part of the phrase (the one before “but”) take a deep breath, pause, and don’t say it.

- **Obtain additional information**

Take a brief moment to understand why the other person thinks the way he does, say what he says, and questions what he questions. If someone says “let’s prioritize report X...” instead of immediately responding “Yes, but, better to work on it tomorrow,” it is much better to say “*Explain why.*” This will open the doors to the magic of communication.

- **Practice**

We have had a whole life constructed around the word “but.” That is not going to change overnight. It will take time; it will require patience and practice. Make mistakes and learn from them.



Remember, all you have to do is say “I see...” and then immediately ask “why?...”

- **Ask for help**

People around you can help you listen to yourself when the word “but” is uttered. Let your team know that you want to learn how to listen. They will feel involved and thankful. This learning opportunity could even become a moment to unwind. Humor is one of the best allies in these situations.

- **A final tip**

Always be clear about your intentions when listening: you can either respond to what the other person is saying or understand what is being said. These choices position you in two very different places. The second one, much better than the first.

Sharing Best Practices

We are aware that changing old habits is not an easy task. We know it takes time and that this change process can only be activated if we start to value and believe that a better performance is possible.

We would like to share a Ted **Talk** (*) by Matt Cutts. Interestingly, the presenter is a Google engineer, who helps the fight against SPAM (use of the word “but” could be considered spam). He helps webmasters to understand how to search and identify “words.” In this short presentation he helps us to think about how to achieve an outcome.

Watch this 4 minute video by clicking the icon in the left column (you have the option of selecting subtitles in other languages). Get rid of your “buts.” Try it for the next 30 days – at least.

http://www.ted.com/talks/matt_cutts_try_something_new_for_30_days.html

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