

## **Let Their Lights Shine: Six Ways to Make Sure Everyone Has a Say (and Isn't Just Letting the Leader "Win")**

by Kimberly Douglas, SPHR, CPF

You know it's true...you can't "cut" your way into revenue growth. While keeping a keen eye on expenses is always important – you need engaged employees excited about sharing their bright ideas to really boost the top line. So how do you get that engagement...and make sure the leader isn't keeping too tight a lid on "the firefly jar"?

**1. Have the team write down their thoughts first before sharing them aloud.** This gives each member a moment to consider how best to phrase their points in order to ensure that others receive the message as intended. It will also help to keep comments tight and on point versus sharing rambling thoughts off the top of their heads, or being ill-prepared to disclose any topics that they feel are worthwhile.

**2. Have a small-group discussion first, followed by a large-group debrief.** There is safety in numbers. If something difficult needs to be said, the spokesperson can defer to the group's thinking without taking personal responsibility. Together, they can also figure out the best way to raise a delicate issue before bringing it to the entire team's attention.

**3. Have the team leader leave the room for part of the discussion.** While I don't normally advocate this technique, I have opted for it when extremely sensitive issues are involved or when team members feared a leader's retribution.

For example, in one situation, a manager whose team saw her as overbearing and unreasonable wanted to know what they expected of her as a leader. She thought they would be more open in sharing this if she were not in the room; and she was right about that. Their respectful but candid feedback, which she accepted graciously and without defensiveness, went a long way toward building a strong bond between them.

**4. Submit comments anonymously.** If this is a highly sensitive subject, anonymous comments are a great way to solicit input. Protect anonymity by distributing paper and pencils for everyone to use so that there is no guessing about who wrote what. Of course, be sure to mix up the papers after you collect them prior to sharing them with the group.

**5. Use round-robins.** This is a great way to make sure that you give everyone equal airtime. Depending on where you are in the discussion cycle and how much time is remaining, you might need to ask people to limit their input by asking them to speak in headlines; that is, as you might read it on the front page of the newspaper. Do not use this approach, however, if you have not fully vetted a topic. People may feel pressured to summarize their position in a headline without providing some rationale as to why they feel this way.

**6. Always have the leader offer his/her opinion last.** This is one sure way not to influence the direction of the discussion. If you're the leader, don't let the team know what direction you are leaning on a topic until you have heard from everyone. Who knows—you might even change

your mind! And when you do share your opinion, be sure that you clearly show that you value what others have said before you. Be candid and honest with your opinion—as they all were—but keep in mind that your perceptions carry extra weight with the group, so measure your words accordingly.

By taking action on these quick tips, you will make sure that all of your employees glow with the excitement of having their ideas heard!



**Kimberly Douglas**, SPHR, President of FireFly Facilitation, Inc. is a nationally recognized team effectiveness and innovation expert. Over the past 25 years, she has collaborated with hundreds of leaders – at organizations such as Coca-Cola, Home Depot, McKesson, AT&T, and even the U.S. Marine Corps – to dramatically improve their business performance. Certified as a Senior Professional in Human Resources and a Certified Professional Facilitator, Kimberly also holds a Master of Science in Industrial/Organizational Psychology. An expert in the field of team-based innovation, Wiley just released her book, *The Firefly Effect*. She is a frequent contributor to management and leadership publications, including *Investor's Business Daily*, *Leadership Excellence*, *American Management Association*, *Success Magazine*, *Yahoo Finance* and *USA Today*. Contact Kimberly by email at [KDouglas@FireFlyFacilitation.com](mailto:KDouglas@FireFlyFacilitation.com) or by phone at 770-989-7030.