



EPICENTRAL

A Newsletter from Epicenter Development Group
highlighting ideas that improve organizations

Welcome to Epicenter Development Group's newsletter, EPICentral. The purpose of this newsletter is to highlight fundamental ideas that have helped organizations develop and maintain great manufacturing and service operations. We hope that you find our EPICentral newsletter helpful, and we would welcome your comments on its content.

Eliminating Miscommunication with the ECHO Communication Tool

There are, perhaps, hundreds of tools and techniques centered around improving communication, resolving conflict and solving problems. Some of these tools, however, stand out from the pack because of their combination of simplicity, usefulness, and potential to catapult things to the next level. This month's tool, ECHO (Effective Communication by Hearing Others), is one such tool. It is simple to understand, can be used in a variety of situations, and can fundamentally shift how people communicate within an organization.

The problem that ECHO addresses involves listening. In our experience, most people typically don't fully listen within a conversation. Rather, they merely take turns giving their own views and opinions (while thinking up things to say while the other person is talking). At best, this leads to ineffective conversations. At worst, this leads to miscommunication or even personal conflict. ECHO is designed to "short-circuit" this issue by forcing each side to actively listen within the conversation.

The Approach

The ECHO process can be used any time there is a discussion (within a meeting, within a group or between two people) and can be done ad hoc or as a planned step in a process:

Step #1 - Start with the other person - ask the other person to state their opinion or convey some information.

Step #2 - Ask questions until you feel that you understand what the other person is trying to communicate.

Step #3 - Repeat, in your own words, what you believe is being communicated.

- Example: "What I hear you saying is that . . . Is this correct?"

Step #4 - If the other person feels that you have not "gotten it," then ask them for further clarification on what they have said.

- You must continue to try to "get it" until the other person is FULLY satisfied that you have heard them correctly.
- Remember that the essence of the message is more than just the words.
- Example: "You're saying that you're frustrated that I'm...and that you would like me to..."

Step #5 - Once you have demonstrated that you have fully heard the other person, then it is your turn to state your opinion or convey information.

- You can then check for their understanding of what you have said.

Benefits

There are several benefits that can be gained through the use of the ECHO tool:

- It leads to greatly enhanced communication, because this process forces participants to actively listen and encourages questions.
- It effectively eliminates assumptions (the source of most misunderstandings).
- It provides immediate feedback when people are not being clear in their communication.
- People are much more open to listening if they feel that they have really been heard.
- This approach slows down the conversation - this is a huge benefit when there is an emotional issue being discussed.
- In many cases, conflict can be resolved much easier when all participants are CLEAR on the facts, feelings and opinions.

How to implement

Use of the ECHO tool will probably feel strange at first, and you might get some resistance from other people who are not yet acquainted with this way of communicating. I would suggest the following actions to smooth the transition into using this tool:

- Start "small" in using the tool. Try it out at home and in conflict-free business communication. Basically you are practicing what is referred to as Active Listening.
- Tell other people what you are doing and why. The purpose for using the tool is to enhance your ability to understand what others are saying and to become a more effective communicator.
- If you would like to use this tool within meetings, set it as a formal "ground rule." If you can give it a meaningful name, then you can also refer to it when things get out of hand - "Perhaps we need to ECHO in order to get to the root of what is really being said. OK?"

Next Steps

If you would like more information on this topic or other similar types of tools, please contact Bill Proctor with your request at wproctor@epicentergroup.com or 216-702-0952. You can also find previous issues of EPICentral at [Newsletters](#).

Mr. Proctor also speaks on a variety of problem-solving and system design topics that can help companies significantly increase the success and profitability of their businesses. If you are interested in having Bill speak at one of your upcoming meetings/events or would like more information on any of the speaking topics, please visit [Speaker Services](#) or you can email sales@epicentergroup.com.

Epicenter Development Group is a unique consulting firm that seamlessly integrates the disciplines of Systems Engineering and Organizational Analysis & Development to create practical design solutions to your toughest challenges. It is on the cutting edge of problem-solving solutions and the creator of a unique process called GreenRoom Engineering. This process adds greater value and cost savings for clients as compared to traditional engineering methods.

William Proctor, Epicenter's founder and president, has provided services around the country to more than 100 companies consisting of a variety of organizations; and Epicenter continues to grow as a resource for firms of all sizes.

To learn more about Epicenter Development Group, visit our website:

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Epicenter News

We are happy to announce that we have opened a second office in Perrysburg, Ohio.



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