



A Cordial Shout-Out To The Corporate World!

Diedra Thomas Ajayi

There may be a genuine reason why your employees are not speaking up when asked about what's going on in your company:

If they don't speak up, they get to keep their jobs!

Why tell the King or Queen how to fix the guillotine?

A True-Case-In-Point:

One of my first jobs was a data entry position with a collection agency.

When the owner saw a wastebasket full of crumbled stationery, he asked a coworker and me to come into his office and share our opinions on his recently purchased electronic typewriters.

Well, my sheets were crumbled; you couldn't see my coworker's, they fell neatly folded to the bottom of her wastebasket.

We hated those typewriters.

Once the hottest gadgets on the market, they were now obsolete, a waste of time, money and stationery: they were made with small monitors that displayed a single line of words that blurred across a badly lit screen. Every time we made a typo we got confused about where we stopped scrolling, only to find out after the letters were printed.

And who could blame us; we were too accustomed to our home-based, user-friendly personal computers that recently hit the market.

He asked my co-worker first to share her thoughts about the typewriters; she shrugged her shoulders and told him, "they're okay." I thought, "That's not what you told me."

Then he asked me to share my thoughts, and I did—all of them. Then for some reason, I begin telling him how much better we can do our jobs using WordPerfect's new mail merge feature on the personal computers that just hit the market.

Somehow I missed the play it smart but stupid meeting. You know where they give you pointers on what to do and say in certain situations like, *just smile and wave* at the boss like its all good when he or she asks you what's going on in your department.

Now I get to learn first-hand why my coworker cordially shrugged him off?

His ears began to smoke—well I saw smoke.

He slowly leaned forward, paused, stared deeply at me without blinking. Finally in a slow, raspy tone he said, “you mean I don’t know how to make wise decisions.”

That’s when I knew, that he knew, what we all knew to be true, he’d been had by a salesperson in need of a clueless candy-person to rid his company of their obsolete equipment.

**Do You Know What They Know?
Do They Know What You Know?
How Much Does It Really Matter?**

What are employers to do when they don’t know the truth until it’s too late—after the deal’s done, the paperwork is signed and the deadlines have passed, and all because their employees refuse to speak up in company meetings? Not even the wonderfully flavored coffee and Crispy Crème donuts can get them to speak up.

What are employees to do when they speak up in an attempt to share important information, only to get reprimanded, or get the guillotine? They’ve learned to stay safe by keeping quiet in meetings. Then like clockwork, they leave the meetings to go linger around the water fountain and complain about everything that’s going wrong in the company.

It’s a true Catch-22 Scenario: Employers ask employees to share their opinions; employees openly share their opinions, employers get angry; employees stop sharing their opinions, now employers are condemned to eternal darkness.

Getting employees to speak up when surrounded by management and their colleagues can be as bad or worse than pulling teeth. I’m sure my former boss wished it were his teeth that got pulled, instead of the money that was pulled from his wallet.

Speaking of Crispy Crème donuts, would you believe a few years later I was called into another executive’s office to *share* my opinion?

Once again I didn’t see it coming, not right away...

It was for a maternity-leave assignment assisting a company’s CEO who one day asked me to share my opinion with him. He has a copy of my resume in front of him, “I see Diedra from your resume that you’ve had the opportunity to work a great deal in corporate America.”

Our bi-weekly departmental meetings are not generating feedback.

I have an open door policy where any employee can come to me without making an appointment and freely express their opinions, yet I hear nothing from them except how much they appreciate the wonderfully flavored coffee and Crispy Crème donuts.

“I don’t know why they’re not biting,” he said slightly baffled.

“Oh they’re biting all right,” I think to myself, “just not at the issues besides, “Who wants to speak up only to get reprimanded or beheaded in public surrounded by their coworkers and all of management?” “What do you suggest I do,” he asked.

And BAM, I suddenly remember my electronic typewriter experience!

“Huh! What! Again, are you kidding, why ask me what you should do? You’re the CEO. What did I ever do to you? I’m just passing through here,” I think to myself.

This time I pause to think before speaking, all I knew to do was to tell him about my mind-boggling typewriter experience—basically to get me off the hook. I had no idea what was going on in the company. I was working in corporate office with all the other uninformed people, drinking bottled water.

There were no water fountains in corporate office to linger around.

I gave him a bonus and told him how on some assignments I often saw opinion boxes strategically placed throughout the companies, and that his situation could be one of the reasons they used them.

Now, I thought to myself, you’re on your own, please, don’t ask anymore *I’d like you to share your opinion questions.*

The Shout-out:

And that could be why your employees are not telling you what’s really going on in your companies. If you do ask for their opinions, cordially accept it; and appreciate their interest to help, their honesty and most importantly their courage to respond, while shaking in their shoes hoping all odds are not against them.

If they still don’t come forward, just shrug your shoulders, *smile and wave* like its all good, and have your assistant purchase a few opinion boxes.

Be sure and purchase the pads that do not ask for their names; you don’t want to know what famous movie stars suddenly left their famed and fortune lives in Hollywood for the opportunity to work for you. It’s a waste of writing space.

When that assignment ended I moved down the hall to assist the company’s V.P. of human resources. One day we had a couple of hours of free time. The VP asked me to come into the conference room and assist her.

There were two boxes on the table, as we began removing and counting the items, she asked me if I was enjoying working in different departments and how much they appreciate my work. Then she said that maintenance was coming up to install the contents of the boxes throughout the company. They were full of opinion boxes, writing pads and pencils.

You thought I had another *can I get your opinion experience* to share didn’t you?

Oh and by the way, they tell me that your better responses will come from the boxes you place closest to the restrooms. It is one of our most popular places we freely think. So be sure and place lots of paper (writing pads) and pencils in them. Think about it, during this time your employees are hidden behind doors with a lot of work-related issues freshly on their minds. So why not give them something to write with so they can tell you all about them, without the fear of losing their heads, or their jobs:).

Until next time!