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The Cone of Silence

I was reminded a short time ago of a prevalent feature of all that CCCC does, encapsulated by an executive with the simple phrase, 'cone of silence'. What he was referring to was the idea that within the company's monthly Problem Management Council¹ each person could say what was on the mind with impunity – as long as it did not point fingers at a particular individual.

Although a bit of a misnomer, the casual phrase should be worded the 'cone of protection', the idea was clear: within this special environment, the speaker was protected. The executive went on to say, how, within the 'cone of protection' he could express a concern to his boss, that in the usual day-to-day office atmosphere, (even in the privacy of one-on-one with his boss), would, otherwise, probably have his boss "tear a strip off me".

The importance of dealing with issues, especially delicate ones in an environment where emotions are neutralized by the process itself, opens the door to staring reality in the face and, therefore, being able to take corrective action directly instead of beating around the bush or flogging the wrong horse or limping away from a charged emotional atmosphere.

Applying the Cone of Protection

Our company CCCC, extends this 'cone of protection' well beyond the Problem Management Council. It extends to all meetings including the difficult problem-solving sessions. That is, as we coach companies towards improvement, the 'cone of protection' is an essential part of the tool kit. Companies that successfully adopt the CCCC way, will find that the 'cone of protection' moves beyond the various meetings, into the hallways and, eventually, throughout the complete enterprise.

Why the Cone of Protection is Important

Intuitively many people will say that the concept of a 'cone of protection' is a good idea just from a social perspective with its ability to neutralize emotions. But it makes sense from a business perspective too. Let us see why that is so.

Making Good Companies even better

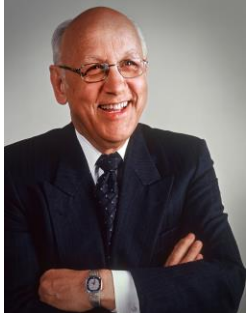
As stated in our tagline, above, CCCC's role is to help good companies become even better, in most instances, to improve dramatically. Some companies, for example, after CCCC's intervention, have shown profits for the first time in several years; some have moved up substantially in sales volume in sharp contrast to their recent history of flat sales; some enterprises have reversed a downward spiral that was headed for an obvious disaster.

a. The Cooperation Factor

While CCCC does become engaged in the various processes of the client companies, that action is only a by-product of the basic CCCC involvement. The real contribution of CCCC is to help the company improve its overall level of cooperation. Naturally the company is looking towards an improved bottom line or a spike in sales, but those are only the results of improved internal cooperation. Cooperation makes things work; lack of cooperation makes things fail. Companies fail due to a lack of cooperation, even though it is the results (limping sales, lack of profits, poor company morale) that people usually point to.

Here is the related conclusion: People choose not to cooperate when under conflict or when they feel threatened, even by the smallest negative thought, idea or barb thrown their way. In the 'cone of protection' conflict is prevented, yet the thought, related to it, is clearly expressed. The 'cone of protection' encourages cooperation which, fortunately, makes everything in the enterprise go up.

¹ The Problem Management Council meets monthly to look at new changes that have come in the door of the enterprise.



William E. Caswell

Bill Caswell is an experienced coach of CEOs and senior executives around the globe. The author of 14 books, Bill has penned the 12-book series *The Respect Revolution* written, by a CEO for CEOs, as a guide to getting your company to *Excellence* and keeping it there.

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b. The Listening Factor

We can define the cause of corporate failure a second way. For those who have studied the CCCC Evolution Pyramid, which maps the life cycle of any enterprise, the constant factor of all companies in trouble is the loss of innovation. Loss of innovation can be explained by the realization that it is the lack of being able to change with changing times. That is, the inability to innovate a different approach that new circumstances demand, will leave the enterprise behind its more nimble competitors. And it will lead to the lethargic company's demise. Just look at any enterprise you know that has failed, and you will see this simple prescription for failure – inability to adapt to change. Here is how things progress: To innovate, you must know how to, why, and where to innovate. That is, first you must keep your ears open, to listen. Innovation is a direct result of listening – to employees, to clients, etc. Stagnation is a direct result of not listening. The 'cone of protection' allows all ideas to come forward and to be listened to. The related conclusion is: The 'cone of protection' allows listening, which steers innovation in the right direction and minimizes the risk of failure.

How the Cone of Protection is an encapsulation of all that CCCC does

With the 'cone of protection' in place companies can increase their cooperation which allows increased prosperity. With the 'cone of protection' established, companies can innovate where it is needed, which helps prevent the companies from failing. In summary, the 'cone of protection' does everything that a company needs to thrive and move forward to its positive future.

May the 'cone of protection' be with you!

Bill

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Bill is always available for comments or questions at
bill@caswellccc.com

Caswell Corporate
Coaching
Company (CCCC)
Ottawa Canada
613-232-1243
www.caswellccc.com