



## IN PRACTICE

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#### Selling T&D in the Organization

by Terrence L. Gargiulo

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Listening is an essential skill for selling T&D in an organization. Listening demonstrates [our department's] ability and willingness to adapt to the needs of an organization. We must go out of our way to understand our customers in order to determine how to help them achieve their objectives. We cannot expect people to come to us. Only after we build strong inroads with people and establish our credibility will people proactively seek our help. Until then we need to reach out. When we listen to people and observe the work they are engaged in, we will discover opportunities where we can make a difference. They may not be what we expect. Going in with an open mind and attentive eyes is what is necessary. We also need to be careful not to jump to conclusions or take what we hear from people at face value. What people ask for and what people need may be very different. Working together we can explore solutions.

The ability to think from other people's organizational and personal perspectives is central to building institutional support and selling T&D. Each area of an organization represents a frame of reference. Because T&D serves all areas of the business we have to become skilled at moving in and out of various perspectives. Our perspective becomes secondary to understanding, appreciating, and thinking from other perspectives. Pacing with people, meeting them on their turf, and making an effort to speak the language inherent to their functional area is our greatest challenge. When we succeed in temporarily abandoning our perspective and immersing ourselves in other people's organizational worldviews, tremendous results become possible. It's a simple truism; when people feel that you have listened to them, they are more inclined to listen to you.

We have to be careful to avoid the temptation to immediately fit a functional area's needs into our collection of prefabricated solutions. That flies in the face of listening. People need to feel that their unique needs have been understood and that we haven't rushed to offer them a cookie-cutter solution. Selling T&D as a strategic asset demands that we help our customers feel unique even when we may realistically slot them into tried-and-true interventions. We stand to learn a lot in the process. Our customers offer us wonderful opportunities to continuously develop, grow, and stretch in new directions. Learning is dynamic, so it should come as no surprise that we need to model these principles in the way we do our work.

As we become more skilled at listening, we also become better at anticipating what our customers will need. We start viewing our



*Terrence L. Gargiulo, MMHS, is an author, international speaker, organizational development consultant, and group process facilitator specializing in the use of stories. He holds a Master of Management in Human Services from the Florence Heller School, at Brandeis University, and is a recipient of Inc. Magazine's Marketing Master Award. Terrence is co-founder of the Storytelling Organization Institute (STORI) in New Mexico. Terrence can be reached, [terrence@makingstories.net](mailto:terrence@makingstories.net), phone: 781-894-4381, or website: <http://www.makingstories.net>. This article was excerpted from Terrence's most recent book, [Building Business Acumen for Trainers: Skills to Empower the Learning Function](#).*

customers' new projects and initiatives as opportunities for T&D. We come to the table with ideas and recommendations. Our customers begin viewing T&D as a strategic partner. Powerful things happen when our customers realize we are looking at the world from their organizational perspective. In the beginning it will be impossible for you to reach out to all the areas of your organization, so start with a small win. Small wins add up to bigger ones. As you build momentum and institutional support other areas will hear your T&D success stories and begin coming to you.

Focusing on building strong relationships is critical to the success of selling T&D. We need to allot greater amounts of time to cultivating relationships. How people perceive us is directly related to the amount of time and effort we spend in reaching out to others and taking an active interest in them. Achieving results is only one part of the equation. Broadcasting our achievements and accomplishments in the form of hard facts is not convincing enough to engender trust and widespread support of our activities. We have to reach out and make an emotional connection with people. One of the best ways to do this is to share a story (see *The Strategic Use of Stories in Organizational Communication and Learning* [Gargiulo, 2005], and *Stories at Work: Using Stories to Improve Communications and Build Relationships* [Gargiulo, 2006]). Our customers need to realize we have their best interests at stake.

There is an interesting paradox in people's perceptions of T&D. People require ongoing learning to succeed. Learning implies that the learners are missing some information or experience. However, most people avoid parading their deficiencies in front of others. No one is accustomed to exhibiting personal vulnerabilities and people often fail to see their blind spots. So on the one hand people have a built-in resistance to T&D's generic charter of promoting learning, yet on the other hand people possess an intrinsic desire for receiving learning help and support. Our T&D customers need to believe we can help them and be willing to trust us. When we become too focused on the formalities of T&D we are apt to weaken our relationships with those customers. Marching people through our procedures, processes, and standard course offerings may hinder rather than aid our cause. Not that these things should be eliminated—it's just that they are not enough to build new relationships and nurture existing ones.

In order to build long-term institutional support and sell the benefits of T&D, we need to leverage every person of our team as an ambassador of goodwill. It takes a critical mass of people working together to effectively reach out to all areas of an organization. The foundation for promoting T&D stewardship is the culture we develop within our own teams. We must endeavor to create an ethos for our T&D team that exudes warmth, fascination, and tireless interest in others' well-being and development. These are qualities that generate excitement, commitment, and ownership. There is nothing soft and fuzzy here. Beyond the obvious humanistic merits of such an approach, this advice is couched in utilitarian benefits. Our customers and employees alike will embrace and respond to the positive energy we create. Encouraging our team members to be ambassadors and building a positive working environment for the team will help T&D to become an indispensable partner at the organization's strategic table. We want people to seek our participation and ideas when planning key organizational initiatives. In fact, we will know we have really succeeded in selling the potential of T&D when we begin to help the organization uncover new opportunities, when we are not just responding to support it in achieving the goals and objectives it has already set.