

Make Your Talk Two-Way

By Wendy Mack

As a senior leader, you are often in the position of delivering presentations to your organization. Picture the last time you announced a new strategy or the occasion when you unveiled your vision for the first time. Heads nodded. It seemed as if people heard and understood, but you got no feedback, no real reaction. You saved five minutes for questions at the end, but there were none, so you quickly wrapped up.

Fellow consultant Allison Davies writes, “The key reason that employees are reluctant to speak out during meetings is because meetings are poorly structured to encourage interaction. A 10-minute Q&A section does not elicit participation — it shuts people down. If you really want employees to speak out, they need time (lots of it), a safe venue (breakouts, for instance, not a big crowd), and leaders who demonstrate that they welcome all kinds of feedback, including negative comments.”

So, how do you know if employees took away the message that you intended to send? How do you know what your people *really* think about your message?

In situations like these, I like to use a simple, but effective method for actively engaging with the audience. After your presentation, divide participants into small groups. Ask each group to spend 15 minutes discussing the following questions:

- ◆ What about the strategy/vision (fill in the blank) excites you?
- ◆ What concerns you?
- ◆ What questions do you have?

Make sure that someone from each group captures the responses (either on a handout or flip chart). When time is up, spend 15 to 20 minutes *listening* to what people have to say. You will be amazed at how much you learn.

