

The Collector Chronicle

North American Recovery

February 2025

America's Collection Authority

LAST MONTH'S LUCKY WINNER

The lucky winner of our client prize for January is Hearth & Home Distributors of Utah. They have been using our agency since 2008! We will be sending them a gift basket from Harry & David's! Enjoy!



THIS MONTH'S PRIZE

This month we will be giving away a gift basket from Harry and David's. Each client who sends new accounts during the month of February will have their name entered into a drawing. At the end of the month, we'll draw a name, and if it's yours, you'll win the gift basket!

***Don't miss out on your chance to win!
Send new accounts before the
end of the month!
Good luck!!***

Harry & David

"I Don't Know"

By: David J. Saxton
President, North American Recovery

When a first-time manager starts interacting with our Senior Management team, one of the concepts almost everyone struggles with is saying, "I don't know" when they are asked a question to which they don't know the answer.

When a new manager starts dancing around with an answer that clearly tells me they don't know, I stop them, and say, "It's okay if you don't know. I don't know. That's why I'm asking." The first time I do this with a new employee it's a bit shocking for them. But over time, they come around. After much coaching and reassurance that saying "I don't know" is entirely okay—and not only okay, but critical to address the issue at hand—they adopt the phrase into their vocabulary.

Over the years I've spent a lot of time trying to understand why some people struggle with this. While I don't profess to have all the answers—and, as a matter of fact, I don't know—I do have some ideas I wanted to share this month.

First off, I can totally see why someone would be reluctant to admit that they don't know the answer to something. I remember back in elementary school—and even into high school—kids would be teased if they didn't know the answer to a question. I remember one terrible example that happened to my girlfriend in math class, the first day of her freshman year.

That previous summer her parents hired a tutor to help improve her math skills. Word got out about this, and it even made it to the teacher. On the first day of class, he put a problem on the board and asked her to come up and solve it. He intentionally chose a problem that was well above the class level. When she admitted to the entire



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class that she didn't know the answer to the problem, he said, "I thought you had a tutor this summer." When he said this, the entire class said "OOOOoooo. A tutor?" This was so heartbreaking to my girlfriend that she immediately left the classroom, went straight to the office, and transferred into another class.

It makes me tear up writing this and thinking about how terrible she must have felt. I think of this often. It's one of the reasons I make sure I never say or do anything to a new manager that would make them feel the same way my girlfriend felt that day in front of the class.

Most of us have probably had a similar experience where we were embarrassed or uncomfortable in a situation where we didn't know the answer. I know I have. If it's never happened to you, consider yourself fortunate.

So, I completely understand when a new manager is reluctant to admit that they don't know the answer. In addition to past experiences they may have had, some managers worry that admitting they don't know something is a sign of weakness. After all, a supervisor or boss should know the answers, right? Not exactly.

No one can know everything, and no one can have EVERY SINGLE policy or procedure memorized. Maybe if you have a photographic memory—but most people don't have that superpower (or mutation, if you prefer).

Don't get me wrong, a boss needs to know the overall company, and department objectives. They should also have a good working knowledge of the processes and procedures for each role in their department. But that's not what I'm talking about. I'm talking about encountering a new or unique situation. When that happens, it's okay to pause and admit you don't know. Not only is it okay, but it's critical to being able to uncover the truth and effectively deal with the situation.

But just saying "I don't know" isn't enough either. You must follow up and say, "But I'll find

out." That's the key! Have the courage to admit you don't know, then immediately follow it with, "I'll find out!"

Once a manager masters this mindset of personal stewardship, the next step is to teach it to their direct reports. The response then evolves to, "I don't know, but let's find out together," or "I don't know, but I know who we can ask," or "I don't know, but let's make some calls and find out (or do a web search and find out)," or something similar to that.

It's a two-step process: Admit you don't know, then find out. As long as you do this, you'll be fine. Actually, you'll be better than fine. You'll gain the respect of everyone you work with, and you'll be a much better problem solver.

This process does two things. First, it shows others you're okay with admitting you don't know everything. People like that and will trust you. Second, you displayed the ability to find the answer when needed. That's a valuable trait too. Then, when you find the answer, you will have the data you need to make the best possible decision.

One last thought. If you've ever been afraid to say, "I don't know" because someone might look down on you, don't be. Here's why. If you use the phrase, "I don't know" and the person you're talking to says anything other than, "That's okay; let's find out together" (or something similar), you should take a long hard look at your association with that individual.

Admitting you don't know something is the first step in being able to learn and grow.

Will this work with everyone? I don't know. But give it a try and see what happens. I've found it to be a much better way to deal with people and situations. Have a great month!

-Dave.



The Collector Chronicle is published monthly by NORTH AMERICAN RECOVERY for prospective and current clients. Please direct questions or comments to the editor, Dave Saxton, at DaveSaxton@North-American-Recovery.com.

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