



LEADING EXPECTATIONS: “WAS IT SOMETHING I SAID?”

✧ · by [Carlann Fergusson](#) · in [Coaching Corner](#), [Emotionally Intelligent Leadership](#), [Leadership Lessons](#)

[Learned](#), [Practical Steps to Influence](#).



I was listening to a woman tell us how she returned home to find her kitchen a mess and her husband with his right hand in a bowl covered with brownie mix up to his elbow.

She said in an agitated tone, “*Just what are you doing?*”

He sheepishly replied “*I was trying to surprise you for your birthday by making brownies.*”

“*OK,*” she says calming down, “*but that doesn’t explain why your hand is covered in batter.*”

Her logical husband answered defensively “*Well it was all going fine, until I got to the part in the directions that said ‘Beat 50 strokes by hand.’*”

Setting Clear Expectations

As managers we know that one of the most important aspects of our job is to set clear expectations for our employees. Seems simple enough, but how often does this go wrong? As a former HR Manager, I dealt with many managers who were ready to fire someone for doing something wrong.

My first question was “*Did you make the expectations clear?*” Often the desire to fire ended there.

Likewise, I ask myself that question when getting ready to assume that someone “just doesn’t get it.” In today’s workplace that simple skill is even more important.

Going Global: Table the Discussion

I’m leading a discussion with a cross-functional global team and it’s a pretty heated discussion about why a part failed. It is a critical, complex discussion so we have flown the team members into headquarters. A manager from Ireland brings up an issue that is indirectly related to the topic.

Being a skilled facilitator I say “*Let’s table that discussion.*”

The rest of the team gets back to the main topic but this Irish man interjects with his issue. Another manager from England joins his conversation. I keep bringing it back to the main topic, but the Irish and English managers keep returning to the tangential topic.

Very quickly, the team is getting frustrated.

I stop the discussion and say to the Irish manager “*I thought we agreed to table that discussion.*”

He answers “*Me, too.*”

I add “*Then why do you keep bringing it up?*”

He responds “*Because you told me to table the discussion.*”

A bit confused (but with a light starting to go off in my ‘jumping to conclusions’ brain), I ask “*What does ‘table it’ mean to you?*”

He explains that it means to **immediately bring the topic up** for discussion.

The laughter in the room starts and I apologize and explain that in the United States to “table a discussion” means to set the topic aside for a later discussion. Now we are all laughing and sharing our global experiences of trying to communicate with one another.

This can be fun, but it also can go bad quickly!

Morale of this story:

- Define the meanings of the terms you use
- Avoid idioms, jargon, and colloquialisms
- Be very careful of your own assumptions

In a Rush? Text It

Having been a Labor Relations Manager, I got very skilled at scrutinizing emails before I sent them. I approached my email editing with this thought in my head:

“Is there any possible way that what I have written could be misconstrued?”

This discipline stayed with me as a habit and worked most times.... Except when I was in a rush.

Haste Makes Waste

A colleague and I had little time for lunch due to a rush project. I offer to pick something up while I am out running an errand. We decide on this great place but since it has such large portions we agree to get one to-go order and split it.

It's now two hours since we planned this lunch and I'm in line to order. I decide I could eat more than half an order so I text my co-worker this:

"I'm hungry. You're getting your own."

He quickly responds "OK, leaving now to get chili."

I quickly call him to apologize and explain my intent of placing two orders.

Morale of the story:

- A hurried e-mail or text can waste more time than it takes to recheck it for misinterpretation before sending
- Always be clear of your intent
- Don't assume that because you've worked with someone for a long time that they will read your mind
- The first time you read emotion in a text or email, pick up the phone to ensure your assumed tone of voice is correct. Before you call clear your mind of assumptions. When you do call use a calm, friendly voice.

To Err is Human

Of course it's even funnier when we are not the ones making the error.

I'll end with this story from Snoops [Cake Talk](#). A mortician found a card on flowers that were sent in honor of the deceased. Apparently the person placing the order asked the florist to "write 'Rest in Peace' on both sides. And if you can fit it in, 'We'll see you in eternity.'" The card on the flowers said exactly that:

"Rest in Peace on both sides. And if you can fit it in, we'll see you in eternity."

I've Shared Mine, Now Share Yours

**What are some examples you can share from your world of work? Please share the lesson learned as well!
I would love to hear your thoughts!**

Never miss an issue of [Linked 2 Leadership](#), [subscribe today](#).

Learn, Grow & Develop Other Leaders™



Carlann Fergusson is owner at *Propel Forward LLC*

She provides seminars and consulting on Strategic Leadership Challenges

[Email](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Web](#) | Skype: carlann.fergusson