TARGETING our Attention

A communication strategy with high impact results

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They say that inspiration can strike anywhere. As I recently discovered, "anywhere" can even mean a hospital emergency room!

Now going to a hospital is about the last thing anybody wants to do—especially on a holiday weekend. But that's exactly where I found myself on the 4th of July, and where I experienced something unexpected, yet inspiring, that would change my life.

"Right now, you are the most important person in the world to me."

These are the words my doctor said to assure me as I tried to describe my symptoms but feared I might be taking too much of his time. I was keenly aware of other people that needed his help and wanted to be respectful. His kind words immediately stopped my worry, and they caused me to feel valued and cared for. I was reassured that I was worth the time, and together we would get through this.

It got me thinking about how these words could be applied to our daily lives in right of way and infrastructure management. These words—which can be used during face-to-face contact with property owners, interactions with colleagues and even during educational classes and meetings—can change a life. Imagine if we let each property owner know that, right now they are the most important person in the world to us. How different would the conversation be? How different would they feel, and how much better an outcome could result?

Now think about the impact we can have by giving our colleagues or direct reports that same level of attention. How might this affect the way they see and trust us? And if we were able to open up true and honest communication channels, how might this positively impact their personal life?

What if our instructors applied this in the classroom, letting their students know that they are the most important people in the world to them? How different might the learning experience be? How much better would a student feel about contributing and asking questions, taking risks in an effort to gain a deeper understanding of the subject matter? Just imagine how far reaching the effects could be, especially as it applies to their future professional growth and development.

Now think about how these words might impact our own work. What if we truly listened and were as intensely and urgently plugged in to another human being's needs as my doctor was to me in that emergency room? How greatly would this enhance our leadership skills and our ability to transform lives?

Recently, I put this into action and tried it with a colleague. Initially, I had to actually say the words silently to myself, "right now you are the most important person in the world to me." This really helped me to stay focused. I felt completely in tune with this person and what they were saying. It lasted all of 30 seconds before my mind wandered, and I realized that for this to work, I had to repeat those words over and over again in my mind. This finally did the trick and helped me to refocus. Clearly, it is not easy, but with practice and discipline, I have learned that it is a high impact tool that improves leadership, communication, compassion, understanding and outcome.

I encourage you to give it a try. And be prepared for some amazing results. ✪

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