



Stanford eCorner

Choose Your Words Carefully

Richard Scheller, *Genentech*

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Video URL: <http://ecorner.stanford.edu/videos/2718/Choose-Your-Words-Carefully>

Genentech Executive Vice President Richard Scheller describes his early days in management. Lacking knowledge of many business practices and operations, Scheller worked to bring himself up to speed, particularly in the area of managing and working with employees. In this amusing video, Scheller says these experiences taught him that managers must choose their words carefully, because employees will ultimately try to do what you ask.



Transcript

One of the things that I did there was... Someone said to me, "You should meet the head of HR." And I said, "What does that stand for?" Honestly, I have no idea what that stood for. He said, "Human Resources." I said, "Oh, Human Resources." That kind of sounded to me like they must hire the people. So then someone explained to me what HR is and they do all sorts of things and so on, so I learned. But one of the things that the Executive Committee of Genentech at the time decided to do is to collect 360-feedback from our peers and folks that work for us and sort of tell us how we're doing. So this was a really noble experience for me. My first 360-feedback, let me see if I can remember. They said I was aloof, arrogant and dismissive. And I said, "Of course, I am. How do you think I survived as a scientist?" It was a competitive arena.

But they said, "Well, you know BS. It's probably not going to work here. So what we'd like you to do is then to go discuss your 360 feedback with your reports and one level down, your directors." So I said, "Wow. OK, we'll go do that." So I went into the room with these people and as a fact, I knew that, yes, most of these people said that I was those things. I didn't know anyone specifically who said it. Of course, it was anonymous. But I said, "Well, gee, people say I'm aloof, dismissive and arrogant and I can understand this. I mean, my parents said that. My wife says that, my colleges at Stanford say that. You say that.

I cannot figure out how you're all wrong in the same way." So I basically found that you need to be a much better listener. You need to really, really respect folks and their opinions. But it is very, it is different in industry compared to being here. I think part of the reason that people found me quite brash was the fact that here, when I said something, nobody actually did what I said. Hopefully, they at least marginally considered it, but then they would go, "No, really?" I mean, post docs, students and then they go do really what they wanted to do, which was fine. So I took that attitude to Genentech and actually found very quickly that-well, I didn't really want the atmosphere of the company to be that way-but it is just different and it is somewhat more hierarchical and that people actually do what you say. So you have to be really careful with what you say because folks are going to take it incredibly seriously.