

Effective communication begins by deliberately analyzing a situation *before* the encounter. *Then* planning.

Let's see how it works.

### *What Makes a Difference*

The Exec, if he/she thought about it, would know that a straight frontal attack will surely produce predictable results: Mike would either be defensive and give excuses, or agree to anything just to make it end. Therefore, to be truly effective, the Exec should start the meeting out on a totally different tack—information gathering.

By turning away from the predictable fury-and-threat reflex, he/she could start the meeting with a defused, benign (though very active) tone. The meeting then becomes a quest for clues and problem solving; a diagnosis rather than an eye-to-eye confrontation.

The new tack could go something like this:

EXEC: "Mike, I know you've been having problems getting your reports in on time. I'm sure you don't like that any more than I do. Let's sit down and figure out what's going wrong and how to fix it. "

Now look at what he/she just did. No threat. No anger. (Two modes guaranteed to turn off Mike's thinking part.) The Exec shows recognition of a problem *and* recognition that Mike is probably upset by it and seemingly powerless to fix it alone. The Exec shows his/her ability and willingness to help solve it *and* to help Mike, not just simply to chastise him.

Mike's response? Disarmed and relieved, he's suddenly able to be very open in confronting the late-report problem. The Exec has established a surprisingly different atmosphere than the one Mike expected after being called on the carpet—one that encourages honesty on both sides.

Creating a safe environment in which to consider the issue and *only* the issue, of why the reports are late, the Exec is on the way to fixing that. And Mike's basic character, general abilities, or good intentions are still intact, rather than threatened or called into question as in the first script.

- Result: Teamwork and constructive solutions. Mike can get some real help and new information about how to deliver reports on time, and the Exec's reports have a realistic chance to come in on time.