

## **T.A.I.D.**

Dan Evans, May 2003

Do you know someone who can't go more than an hour without offering some "constructive" criticism? I do. I am he...sometimes...in weak moments.

I was once much worse. Ask anyone who worked for me up until just a few years ago. I understood that I had that tendency, but I thought it was an attribute; something that made me a better person. And, there were actually people along the way who perpetuated that belief, who encouraged me. Shame on them.

Through a number of circumstances I gradually learned that it could be a negative experience for someone to be around me when I was in that mode, which was most of the time. However, it wasn't feedback from my victims that got my attention, it was being around other people who shared my talent, that caused me to change. I didn't much care for it and that promoted my own self awareness and attempts to change.

It is really difficult to keep your mouth shut when you know you are right. Strangely enough, it is even more difficult when you just think you are right. The challenge is to learn to offer your wisdom selectively, when you ascertain that it is most needed and most welcome. Or, at least most needed (some people never welcome valid suggestions).

Over time I learned to pace myself and adopt a four step approach to giving advice that I call Think–Articulate–Instruct–Demonstrate (T.A.I.D.). I try very hard, every time I see an opportunity to unleash my wisdom on someone, to ensure that I can meet these four steps of giving helpful, welcome advice before I speak. If I can't, I must assume that I am not correct, or at least will not be convincing. Usually, I then refrain from speaking. When I fail to refrain, I usually end up looking or sounding more flawed than the person I am trying to help.

### **Think**

When you observe someone doing something that you feel could be improved upon, evaluate just how serious the situation is and how it might be received. Take into account who the person is, their own satisfaction with the task they are performing, your relationship to the person, the importance of the task and its impact on other people or processes, the person's stress level and your attitude about it.

If your assessment reveals that the timing is wrong or that it won't be received well, shut up!

If the person is an employee, subordinate or your child, and all other factors are positive, you may be valid in proceeding even if you know the advice will be unwelcome. However, that situation may call for extra sensitivity or perhaps a slightly different approach. Or, you may just need to tell him or her to shut up.

### **Articulate**

When the *Think* step reveals a truly acceptable opportunity to give advice, rehearse your argument to ensure that your idea can be communicated clearly, concisely and logically. If you can't express it clearly to yourself, then it is pointless to try and communicate it to someone else. Often, by rehearsing it to yourself (this is an unspoken mental exercise) you discover flaws in

your approach or opportunities to refine it and make it truly more effective before you speak it out loud.

If you cannot express your point clearly and logically, shut up!

### **Instruct**

If you conclude that the *Think* and *Articulate* steps have a green light, you must then evaluate if you are truly able to teach your concept. Mentally, develop a step-by-step teaching plan to convey your approach. Like the *Articulate* step, this mental exercise reveals missing elements of your plan and helps you refine it before making your presentation.

The worst thing you can do to someone, especially one who is already exasperated with their efforts, is to suggest an alternative approach that you cannot instruct them to perform. Instead of adding value, you confuse and complicate matters only more. The products of the *Articulate* and *Instruct* steps are closely related and must be achievable without annoying the mentee, or they will simply be rejected.

If you cannot instruct clearly and simply, shut up!

### **Demonstrate**

Even if all three of the previous steps get a green light, you must terminate the wisdom exchange if you cannot or choose not to demonstrate your approach.

Who want's a driver's ed teacher who can't drive, a high-dive instructor who is afraid of water, a flying instructor who is afraid of heights or a roto-rooter man who has bad breath (I'm not sure how that fits, but it sounded cute).

Unless you are willing and able to demonstrate your suggestion, you should shut up!

### **It works...I think**

So, there it is, my simple, four-step process to deciding if one should give advice. Often, after processing my idea through these four steps, I decide it is not worth it and ignore the problem I've observed. With practice, you can apply T.A.I.D. to a potential advice opportunity in seconds.

And, yes, before writing this advice, I thought it through, I articulated my argument and provided instruction (this paper). However, I find at the conclusion of this paper, that I am unable to demonstrate T.A.I.D. So, just ignore this and continue criticizing people like you always have. They will tell you when to shut up.