Why we should stop stating "you are wrong"

By Anders Mortin,
Consultant at TriTiCon

We discussed leadership and organization in the recent '2 cents' articles, including the expectation on "knowing it all" or the fear of not knowing the answer. This time I want to highlight another – let's call it "industry culture": *the fear of being "wrong"*.

As we talked about, a leader and team-member are supposed to know it all. They are supposed to have all the answers. Knowledge is seen as the most important key (and becomes a power we fight about), being "right" the next most important thing, second only to "not being wrong", which becomes the ultimate fear.

We seem to be fostering a culture where we get so afraid of being "wrong" that people don't speak up (for fear of being criticized), that we stop challenging the way we do things (what we used to do is "safer"), that we refrain from new or different approaches (afraid of being the one blamed if things go wrong). Only last week, a friend of mine referred to a conversation where employees at one of her clients openly said that they rather not be involved in the situation, since they could be the ones blamed if things went "wrong". We tend to fall into a culture where we focus on finding issues, where we see it as our first and foremost task to find downsides in new suggestions. We often even add our own (incorrect) assumptions to these new suggestions, and then criticize the person, based on our own assumptions.

The result? We safeguard ourselves increasingly more, we don't stick our necks out, we don't speak up and we keep ideas to ourselves. This does not promote development and innovation in how we run our business, and it definitely does not develop us as individuals, team members or employees, nor develop the company we work for.

Learning and growth are what develops us. It is not about knowing the most, it is about learning the most – as individuals and as an organization. It is about adapting, seeing new possibilities, being proactive and taking active ownership for the outcome.

So, what should we do? As discussed before, these are company "cultural" aspects; culture comes from leadership and that's why I believe we need to look at our leadership tactics [read post here]. But we can and should also start with ourselves. How do we look at what others suggest and how do we react to it?

First and foremost: Don't be part of the "right, wrong and blame game". Don't shoot down all suggestions and ideas immediately. Yes, there might be a bad experience, a practical challenge or a regulatory rule to consider, but there might also be some other parts of the idea or suggestion you can work on, that can take you further. Or maybe the "old" way is even worse?

Listen, listen some more, then try to understand what the other person is truly trying to say. Then listen again - without formulating response or opinions at the same time, just listen. Then think, consider, evaluate, ask more questions. Then talk about the idea and possibilities without adding a series of negative assumptions.

Don't talk as if things are carved in stone, that there is only one way, that this is the "right" way and everything else is….yes "wrong". You would be surprised how many contradictory statements I hear presented as "facts" working with our different clients: "this is the only and right way there is".

Don't ever say "you are wrong". And one thing more thing: you don't always have to have the last word.

About TriTiCon

TriTiCon provides expert consultancy for all aspects of Clinical Data Handling. From strategy, organization and vendor selection to system implementation and process development.

TriTiCon combines the 3 Tiers of Subject Matter Expertise, Strategic Understanding and Project Management to fit the needs of each specific situation or company stage.

TriTiCon is not a CRO but can help sponsors with clinical trial set-up and execution, supporting everything from vendor selection and contracting, to set-up, operations and oversight.

TriTiCon Experience Catalogue – www.triticon.com/resources

Disclaimer