



What do you do when a team member exhibits actions or behaviors that seem to be not best, yet they seem unaware of what has happened? Too often we will lead with “Why did you do _____?” and inevitably the “Why” question puts them on the defensive and instead of a conversation seeking understanding and a change of behavior, the result is two people digging in on their respective positions.

Here is a better way, O-I-C.

O is OBSERVE– this is the specific behavior that you observed; just the facts.

I is INTERPRET – this is how you interpreted the specific behavior that you observed.

C is CLARIFY – this is when you ask the other person to clarify your understanding of what you observed.

Here is a way that you might use O-I-C:

OBSERVE: *BG, in our staff meeting this morning I noticed that you spoke rather sharply to Bob and actually cut him off before he was able to finish his point about the shipping plan.*

INTERPRET: *What I saw caused me to think that you are possibly upset with Bob or there are other issues between you two.*

CLARIFY: *Is my interpretation of what I saw correct? Would you help me to better understand what was happening?*

BG: *Not at all, actually I was not feeling well, I had car trouble on the way in to work and was almost late for the staff meeting which resulted in me being frustrated and distracted. I guess I took out my frustration on Bob in our meeting this morning without even realizing what I was doing. I need to go apologize to Bob right away.*



The above was a simple use of O-I-C, but hopefully it does illustrate how the model may be used.

Not only does it engage the other person in a manner that does not cause them to be defensive, it also helps you not to jump to conclusions about what you saw and why it occurred. Too often, we as leaders think we know what happened, but actually we have developed an incorrect narrative about the situation. O-I-C helps you to avoid that trap.

This also deals with the power issues. If you demand answers from someone you are removing power from that person. Asking genuine questions places the power back in the person's hands by making them the knowledge holder, which in turn makes them less defensive and more willing to listen.

Remember when using this, tell the other person:

- What you **OBSERVED**,
- How you **INTERPRETED** what you observed,
- Then ask the other person to **CLARIFY** what was happening.

This will save you headaches as well as give you the opportunity to improve the behaviors of your team members.

