

## Being Direct is Best – Or is it?

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**Many people pride themselves on their honesty, which they associate with being direct with people in most of their dealings. While this trait is admirable, and one this author uses on most occasions, sometimes 'directness' works against the very thing you are trying to achieve. This is true in the job-hunting arena.**

### Let's Start with Examples

If a waiter approaches you directly and says "I expect a 15% tip for this meal which I served you to the best of my ability and, I think, very well" how would you react?

If your friend, Tom, says to you: "Jenny, you're too fat, you eat too much and you should really lose 25 pounds", how would you feel towards Tom?

If you enter a dress shop and the clerk says: "You really don't know how to dress; I can show you some new styles that will be good for you." Would you agree to be shown them?

If your boss delegates a task to you and then says: "Really, Sam, you should not go about it that way; do it my way instead", will you admire your boss the more for it?

*Perverse Results that works against what you really want to achieve*

I think you can forecast that:

The waiter who worked so hard to gain a 15% tip from you will not get it this way, while if had he stuck to the indirect approach, he might have been more successful.

Likewise Tom, who was trying to be a true friend by helping you in a direct manner, for your own good, might be viewed now as less than a friend by you.

We can suppose that the store clerk who imagined that she could greatly enhance the dressing style of you and get more sales, has probably created a determination by you never to return to that shop.

It is easy to predict that Sam will not sense an increase in authority that comes with his being delegated a new task but a frustration at being micro-managed.

Personally, I form a harsh judgment of people who hide their reluctance behind the so-called admirable goal of directness. It is always easier to be direct. It takes thoughtfulness and hard work to be indirect, yet helpful.

### What Went Wrong?

Besides drawing the obvious conclusion that the people saying these things were not very diplomatic, we can draw a more fundamental conclusion: What went wrong is that people perceived that they had lost control of their situation. Most people are not willing to pass over control. Fundamentally, people want to make their own choices: The patron wants to choose how much he will tip.

Jenny wants to set her own schedule and goals regarding her weight.

You want to decide on how to dress and what to buy to suit your own image.

You want to do the new task assignment your way.

Of course you will listen to advice – but you want to have the choice to accept or reject that advice. Even babies do – the toddlers stretching on their harnesses in a direction opposite to that of mom or dad who is attempting to direct them otherwise (i.e. attempting to make choices for the infants).

### How do we make the Situation Better?

If we understand that we are more effective in allowing people to make choices, our role therefore becomes one of suggestion rather than one of giving directions. Notice the word “direct – ions”, direction vs. suggestion – direct vs. indirect. That is we can suggest by our actions and behavior and leave the choice to the other party. In particular, they must feel that the choice has been left to them. In that way they person can achieve their goals. So imagine the four scenarios above re-enacted to achieve the desirable goals.

The waiter provides good service, says nothing, and collects a 15% tip. Tom accepts that Jenny will deal with her weight in her own time, is supportive of her irrespective of her weight and, thus, Tom retains and enhances his friendship with Jenny.

The store clerk says: “A number of new styles have just arrived in our shop; perhaps you might find them interesting. You will find them in section A.” Now you remain in the shop and the odds are you will buy something.

The boss says nothing and allows you to perform your task your way, commenting only after the results have been obtained. Then instead of pointing out any negative outcome, the boss says: “How do you feel about the results?” allowing you discover any shortcomings. Now you would feel empowered by that boss, instead of controlled.

### Applying the Principle of Choice to Job Hunting

In our approach to job-hunting, we prefer the indirect approach. The reason is that most people do not have jobs sitting in their back pockets to hand out. They do not have control over the job situation. So instead of asking for jobs over which they have very little control, we ask for information, which most people have in great abundance and can control the flow of.

In this aspect of the CCI process we give the individual the choice to respond to our written enquiry<sup>1</sup>, the choice see us or not; we give the person the choice to select a time of their convenience; we give the person the choice to talk about what is important to them (in the context of the meeting) and the choice to extend the meeting time to beyond 20 minutes (or not), the choice to refer us to others and we give the person the choice to introduce a job to us if, they happen to have one that fits, (sitting in their back pocket). If we go to 50 people and tell them we want information about their work environment, most will not have jobs and we MUST NOT EXPECT THEM TO HAVE JOBS. However, the one person that does have a job that fits our skills and personality (it must be both – the subject of another paper) they usually will be very happy to tell us because we will have solved a dilemma for that person.

So the method is to gather information. From that information gathering will eventually appear a job (and a lot faster than you would imagine) but you must NEVER expect a job. Therefore in all honesty you can say: “I am just gathering information at this stage. I do not expect a job from you; I do not even expect you to know of a job.” The unsaid portion is that: “I do not expect a job from you but I do expect a job from this process.” Or: “Yes, I am looking for a job but at present I am in the information gathering stage of the process.” (The information meeting is a 2-way street; the other person also gains from the information meeting – the subject of another paper.)

The overall goal is of course to find a job. But in the process you learn a lot about the industry of concern to you, you develop new friends and allies and you learn how to apply interesting lessons related to human behavior and cooperation.

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<sup>1</sup> When we telephone instead of email we have removed the choice of the other party about spending time with us.

### It's not easy but it Works very well

This, perhaps, is the most difficult part of the 17-step CCI process to connect people with jobs of great interest and appeal to them. Some lose heart and walk away from the process at this point – but they usually return. Two such examples occurred this past month at CCI. Here is one of the quotations:

LA: "I am working in the job that I want, doing the things I want, everything I love doing, the impossible dream - and all because of you. I work for XXXX now as a writer, editor, and occasional translator from Arabic to English. It was you who told me to visit a contact I knew there - even though it seemed so hopeless. There were no openings and my friend at XXXX had no rank or influence. But one thing led to another and now I am there full time. I kept applying the things you taught me. The resume worked perfectly. They even told me they hired me because of who I am - attitude rather than a focus on skills - although skills are necessary too. The information meetings allowed me to build a network from nothing, but these new people I met were not only useful towards a job but some of them actually became life-long friends. Every little piece (of the CCI process) offered means something."

Quad erat demonstrandum.

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