



Connect the Dots Before People Draw the Wrong Picture

Remember those Connect the Dots pictures you did as a kid? The dots were numbered and you followed along in order with your pencil to create the intended picture. What would have happened if you were given a Connect the Dots picture without numbered dots? You could have connected the dots any way you wanted, resulting in a picture, but not the intended image.

Now consider this - a part of our brain is devoted to taking in information from the world, our senses, and our memory and combining it into a coherent picture of reality. When that part of our brain does not receive information, it still proceeds with creating a picture with the information it has accumulated. To use an analogy, our brain connects the dots, numbered or unnumbered, resulting in an image, but not always the intended one.

Said differently, in the absence of information, our brains make up stories as a way to make sense of the world. At some point, we have all witnessed this happening or done it ourselves. To compound the distortion, as a survival tactic, humans are wired to anticipate the worst case scenario, resulting in made-up stories that are often more negative than the reality.

Think about this example. Perhaps your neighbor always invites you to her annual holiday party. This year, the usual party time comes and goes without an invitation. In the absence of information, you assume you did something to irritate the neighbor and were thus cut from the guest list. After the New Year, you run into each other and learn her mother passed away, she was out of town, and the party was never held.

Unfortunately, similar situations occur within organizations. Suppose a manager leaves a business suddenly. Without the CEO delivering information on why, other managers become wary and on-guard because "someone can get axed at any time." Within a sibling-

partnership family business, one sibling decides to sell his/her ownership to the other sibling. The employees assume family conflict and dysfunction were root causes and become concerned about the very survival of the business.

The truth in each situation? The manager moved to take care of a sick family member and the sibling decided to take early retirement on a tropical island. Nothing as dramatic as how the employees "connected the dots!"

The moral of the story -

If you have key, factual information to share about a change in your organization, share the facts in a timely fashion before people draw a picture, but not the intended one.