

## 2.1: Meeting With Subordinates

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Meetings between executive and subordinates, individually and as a group, can be conducted using one of three basic methods: tell and sell, tell and listen, and problem solving (Maier, 1973). The objective that can be achieved and the skills needed for an effective meeting depend on the method.

The objective of tell-and-sell is to transmit information. This method is suitable when high acceptance by subordinates is assured or unnecessary, because the strategy involve issues about which subordinates are indifferent. A strategy involving product pricing, sourcing, and coding is of this kind.

The objective of tell-and-listen is to maintain control while encouraging subordinates to express themselves in a setting that is safe and therapeutic. This method is suitable for a strategy that is firm but unpleasing to subordinates, such as one involving termination of service, demotion, transfer, and undesirable working conditions.

The objective of problem solving is to arrive at the best strategy that the executive's team can devise based on the ideas and facts available to all team members. This general-purpose method is suitable for an executive skillful in leading problem-solving discussions. To be successful, the executive will have to work around subordinates' reluctance to admit to problems and to disagree with their superiors. The executive also will have to inhibit the executive's own tendency to make suggestions, because any suggestion made by a superior will be seen as a command by subordinates, and a signal that their views are not welcome. As such, the superior's suggestion will not be properly considered. The suggestion may be met with silence, or vehemently attacked.

High subordinate acceptance is assured when the strategy decided is one devised by the team. The quality of a team-devised strategy, however, depends on the skill of the executive conducting the meeting. Even so, a less-than-best strategy implemented by subordinates who believe in it can be more effective than the best strategy implemented by subordinates who do not believe in it.

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