



[Click to view this email in a browser](#)

June 2014

## Keeping Up With Dr. Steve

Follow Dr. Steve on  
Twitter!

- [@DrSteveAlbrecht](#)

### New Website Coming Soon!

Dr. Steve will be speaking at the Association of Threat Assessment Professionals (ATAP) national conference, in Anaheim, CA August 12th - 15th, 2014



### The Noise Factor in Workplace Conflict

We know the work environment plays a part in emotions, feelings,



and even hormonal responses. When it's too hot, too cold, hard to breathe, or closed in, most people feel their stress levels rise. It's hard to function effectively when you're roasting, your teeth are chattering, your personal space feels invaded, and your cortisol levels start to rise. This can lead to arguments, challenges, threats, and even fights.

Many people, and especially younger people, are uncomfortable with silence, so they seek to fill it, constantly. In some homes the TV is always on, from the moment the residents wake up or arrive back from being out, until they go to bed. Add in some loud music and the people in those homes start to raise their voices and keep them up, just to be heard over the din. And just

like environmental extremes can raise tensions, too much noise can create conflict between people because sound is a personal space invader as well.

Much of my work in team conflicts in organizations follows an interesting parallel: employees stop talking to each other, stop interacting on critical projects, and neglect common courtesies often over little things. When I first arrive in an office environment, I'm expecting the cause of a team's silent treatment of each other to have been caused by something monumental. Most often it's over something small that has been allowed to grow and fester. And often the main culprit is noise.

Consider how much louder it has grown in our offices. The clickety-clack of typewriters and ringing phones that lingered well into the early 1980's was slowly replaced by cell phones and laptops. But these technological advances haven't made things much quieter. The microphones in most cell phones are so sophisticated that you can whisper into them and still be heard. This fact is lost on many of your office mates (and on people in elevators, restrooms, movie theaters, airports, weddings, and funerals), as they shout their personal details into their phones from the next cubicle over. "My doctor says my hemorrhoid operation is gonna take about an hour. They take this big metal tube and they put it in my . . ." Similar conversations about spouses, dates, relatives, sports, gossip, and politics abound, often at a volume in the office where these oh-so-important chats can be heard across the room

and down the hall. Add in Internet radio stations, local sports or political talk radio, and opera, rock, rap, country, or disco, all played through your co-worker's computer speakers and it's hard to stay focused on finishing your TPS reports.

Other small noise-driven things drive employees crazy: co-workers who curse, loudly; those who pop their gum like a sniper's rifle; and those who leave their tabletop "Zen garden" water fountain running all day, which often reminds people over 40 that they need to go the bathroom again. Some offices have policies about how much noise you can self-generate; most don't, relying on individual managers or even HR to set the tone. But how about if everyone in an office environment simply relied on two critical but underused tools to get what they want: Social Intelligence and Direct, Non-Personal, Immediate, Feedback?

As coined by my father, Dr. Karl Albrecht, in his 2009 book ***Social Intelligence*** (Pfeiffer), SI is our ability to get along with people; by realizing we all have an impact on each other, by reading the room all the time, and by saying or doing the right things around each other. The idea of giving co-workers Direct, Non-Personal, Immediate, Feedback says truly mature, professional employees will address those noise things that make it hard for them to do their work effectively. They start with their colleagues, speaking to that person directly (not running to a supervisor or HR first); politely sticking to the business issue (your noise makes it hard for me to concentrate); talking to him or

her right now, instead of scorekeeping on the issue for two weeks, two months, or two years; and using the semantically-kinder and softer word feedback, instead of criticism. Feedback says, "Let's talk." Criticism says, "You stink and here's why."

Lowering the noise levels at work starts with you. Wear your ear buds or headphones if you want to listen to Led Zeppelin, Rush (or Limbaugh), or the Foo Fighters. Speak into your desk phone or cell phone as if you were trying to keep a secret from the rest of the world. Save your shouting for a fire in the building or a big lottery win. No need to turn our work sites into libraries (which are noisy places, too, these days). But consider how much work you could get done, or how much big, deep, critical, or strategic thinking you could do if you and your colleagues each made it a little quieter.

## "Dear Dr. Steve,"

Can you provide us with some advice about the efficacy of the Hawthorne Effect when used to



measure employee productivity as to their current project management capabilities, taking into consideration our time-based studies of their use of both the Internet and our Intranet as they complete certain mission-critical, supply-chain, strategic-plan-intensive duties?

Answer: Uh, no.

Tel: (619) 990-8682

Email: [drsteve@drstevealbrecht.com](mailto:drsteve@drstevealbrecht.com)

---

If you no longer wish to receive these emails, please reply to this message with "Unsubscribe" in the subject line or simply click on the following link: [Unsubscribe](#)

---

Dr. Steve Albrecht  
PO Box 1540  
Alpine, 91903  
US

[Read](#) the VerticalResponse marketing policy.

**vertical** DELIVERED BY  
**response**  
Try It Free Today!