

From the Top - A Direction

Written by Darrin Adams, a retired U.S. Army First Sergeant and currently U.S. Department of Labor, State Director for Veterans Employment and Training. (Army First Sergeants are often referred to as "Top").

As spring/summer approaches, it makes me think about a freshly cut yard with very straight lines versus a cut lawn with curves and wiggles left by the mower.

The wiggled lines are generally a result of the mower operator's failure to select a focused line of sight (direction).

With a focus to navigate towards, the mower generally cuts even and straight lines (which leaves us happy and our neighbors envious).

Could the same be said about the direction you are moving in your leadership development? Are you keeping a good line of sight on your direction, or are you producing curves as you navigate towards your leadership goals?

When you determine where you are going before you take the first step it can leave you feeling good about your progress.

Thanks Top.

Next time you look at a fresh cut lawn think about your leadership development – focused, or curves and wiggles?

Are you feeling good about your progress?

Engagement Again

Since engagement has been in the title of only two Leadership Minutes since 2015 began, you might have developed the impression employee engagement has improved. That impression might be wrong.

According to Gallup¹ the "percentage of U.S. workers engaged in their jobs fell to an average of 31.7 % in March." But it didn't drop too far. It was 32.9% in February. And it has been 33% or higher only twice since the Gallup daily survey began (January 2011).

Gallup also reported some interesting new survey results that we will discuss in upcoming Leadership Minutes as we refocus on engagement. How will you know? You will see engagement in the title.

¹ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/182357/employee-engagement-dips-March.aspx>

Founders' Favorites

Since we began on December 1, 2010, we (our readers, contributing authors, and Ross Leadership Institute Founders) have written well over 1,000 different emails to help our readers practice their

leadership. And thanks to you, we have grown from serving several hundred leaders to several thousand daily.

Over the years, hundreds of our readers have identified one, or more, as their favorites while others have said they aren't always able to read every one. And, of course, those who have joined us over the years haven't received all of them.

As a result, we have decided to start a new series focused on "favorites." As a way to start, we have asked our Founders to select some of their favorites. We are calling the new series, Founders' Favorites and you might have guessed, it will run on Fridays. As you read their favorites, we encourage you to share with us your personal favorites (we will accumulate them and add them to the series).

To get us started, here's one that generated a lot of discussion at a recent leadership presentation (we won't identify the group, so you don't draw any conclusions).

Are you an Orchid or a Weed?

Written by David Crone based on his Work Should Be Fun! blog (with his permission).

Orchids are considered to be beautiful. They are known for being extremely difficult to grow. They are prized, as much for their beauty as for the effort it requires to grow them.

Weeds can also be beautiful. They will grow virtually anywhere. They are tenacious. You hardly need to do anything to get them to grow. Until someone points a finger and says, "Weed!" most people find them attractive.

Orchids are the divas of the flower world. If you treat them just right, you will have a beautiful flower. Weeds simply go about their business, growing wherever the seeds land.

Which one are you? Are you the high maintenance employee, only able to function and produce if all aspects of your work environment are just right? Or are you more like a weed, able to plug in wherever you find yourself and produce despite a less than ideal environment?

Both have value. As for me, I prefer working with weeds. Let the divas, the orchids, have their pristine working conditions. Let them sit there and revel in their own reflection. Give me the weeds, the doers, the people for whom no job is below them, people who simply want to get stuff done.

Effective Leaders Lead Their Boss, Too

Our Founders' Favorites series runs every Friday and features a favorite past Leadership Minute selected by one of our Founders. Here's one from Debbie Johnson, Director of the Ross Leadership Institute.

If you doubt the above title, watch a dog out for a walk. Who's leading? The owner might think they are, but more often than not, the dog is setting the direction and the owner is following. And, when the task is done, who is responsible for "completing the paperwork?"

Still not convinced, watch leadership in its most natural state – children. Do children lead their parents? Surely they do and most are very good at it.

If you ask a group of leaders to list those they lead, you will most often get a listing of those who report to them; some might list themselves, but very few would include their boss. Somehow the concept has negative connotations.

Some say they are being manipulative if they apply leadership concepts to their boss. Either we aren't supposed to talk about leading one's boss, or doing so requires unfair or inappropriate tactics.

This feeling may be a remnant from old, industrial era superior-subordinate terminology. But with the introduction of servant leadership, leading your boss should be a natural state.

The best leaders lead up, down, sideways, and inward. How well you lead your boss is critical to your success.

Founders' Favorites - Three Envelopes

Our Founders' Favorites series runs every Friday and features a favorite past Leadership Minute selected by one of our Founders. Here's one from Paul Otte, author of many of our Leadership Minutes.

Three Envelopes

There is an old story, told in many different versions, of a new leader being given three sealed envelopes by the person he is replacing. He is told, "If you have any problems open one of the envelopes I have left for you and you will find an answer."

Sometime later after experiencing considerable difficulties, sitting at the desk the leader remembers the three envelopes. Reluctantly opening the first one, it says "Blame your predecessor." The leader does and things get better.

Later, the problems return and this time the leader searches for the second envelope. It says, "Blame outside factors." Again, the leader does and again things get better.

When the problems return again, the leader doesn't hesitate and rapidly returns to the desk for envelope number three. It says, "Prepare three envelopes."

Are you on the "envelope continuum?" Hopefully, not.

Do you know someone who is ready for envelope number three?

Heroes

We received an email with a link¹ to the story about the CEO at Gravity Payments. The message said – “Talk about engagement – this guy might be your hero.”

In case you missed the story it’s about Dan Price, founder and CEO of Gravity Payments in Seattle, Washington. He made the news when he announced that he was cutting his salary and pledging that all of his people make at least \$70,000 annually in the next three years.

You have to admire him. But it made us think. When CEOs do positive things for people it makes headlines that quickly spread - but what about everyday leadership heroes?

Here are a few more “hero” stories we heard recently.

One was an IT leader who asked his company to share his bonus equally with the people on his staff that earned it with him. Another leader, in construction, told us the bonus plan he is recommending to the owner starts with allocating 10% to the people on his staff.

We heard about a leader who is personally paying the monthly health care premium for an employee who could no longer work because of a terminal illness. And what about the leaders, at every level, who buy lunch, or coffee, out of their own pocket as a way to say thank you to someone?

They all are our heroes.

Today, be a hero. It can start with a cup of coffee.

¹ <http://www.cbsnews.com/news/gravity-payments-ceo-dan-prices-raise-minimum-pay-economics/>

IMPACT

As we kicked off another Ross Leadership Institute, we asked the participants (as we always do) – *What are your expectations for our leadership program?*

A frequent response was – *to be better at communicating.*

It made us think about a friend and (creativity) mentor, Tom Carney, who was a Professor of Communications at the University of Windsor, Ontario. Using a process he called ‘qualitative research’¹ he found the most important thing someone could do to become better at communicating was – *be better organized.* Tom found it applied to all communications, written, spoken, in large settings, or one-on-one.

As a result, we created a simple tool for organizing your communications. We call it IMPACT. Here’s how it works.

I – what idea do you want to communicate? It focuses your attention and your communication. What are we here to talk about?

M – what’s your mission, what do you want to accomplish, your objective? Some people “wait until the right moment” to “spring” some thing on somebody - the right moment is at the beginning. It continues the focus and commits you to your mission.

P – your proposal. To accomplish it, we need to do the following steps. It forces you to think through your proposal. It shows you are organized.

A – advantages, provide three. Not advantages to you, but to the other person (people). If you can’t come up with three, why would you, or any one else do it? If you have more than three, pick the best three and save the others (for now).

C – consequences, two. Why two? It’s less than three. Why any? The other person is already thinking of them (and it shows you have thought it through). Follow each consequence with but, or however, and diminish its ‘impact.’

T – twenty-four hours. What can ‘we’ agree to do in the next twenty-four hours to move the proposal forward? It builds commitment.

What can you do in the next twenty-four hours to become a better communicator? Practice using IMPACT.

¹ The idea of qualitative instead of quantitative research is worth another Leadership Minute. Watch for it.

Maximizing Stakeholder Value - Employees

In yesterday’s Leadership Minute we wrote about *The Shareholder Value Myth* and proposed a new purpose for organizations – *maximizing stakeholder value*. And we said we would be discussing others stakeholders over the next few days. Today it’s employees.

A stakeholder is by definition someone with an interest in or a concern for something - in our case it’s an organization. There’s little doubt that the employees have a stake in their organization - its success, or failure.

And as we have said before – People are an organization’s most important asset. In many organizations the value of the people asset exceeds the total investment of the financial investors (shareholders).

How do we maximize that (stakeholder) value? There are many ways, but (today) we will focus on just two.

First is by investing in the asset – people. The most common ways we invest in our people is through training and education. And to maximize their value, organizations must then increase their responsibilities and turn their people loose.

Doing the same thing, in the same way, year after year doesn’t increase an employee’s value. Holding people back from reaching their maximum potential, not only minimizes their individual value, but it also reduces the organization’s value.

The second way to maximize the employee stakeholder value is by engaging people (and keeping them engaged). Every disengaged person decreases the value of the people asset. That means any organization with less than 100% of the people engaged is losing stakeholder value.

What about your organization, is it maximizing its employee stakeholder value? What about you, are you maximizing the value of the people (asset) you are responsible for?

Maximizing Stakeholder Value – Suppliers and the Community

This week we have been writing about *The Shareholder Value Myth* and a new purpose for organizations – *maximizing stakeholder value*. The last two stakeholders we will discuss are suppliers and the community.

Many may not consider either suppliers or the community as stakeholders, but they do have an interest and a concern in the organization and its future. And that, by definition, makes them stakeholders.

In some organizations suppliers may be viewed solely as a “necessary evil,” one that provides a needed input, or service at the best price possible (for the organization – the “lowest bidder”). This belief can have negative consequences. The supplier can decide whether, or not, to provide (in a timely manner) what an organization needs.

Great organizations recognize that a supplier relationship is much more like a partnership. That’s what Donatos calls them, business partners. And Donatos success has been built on treating their suppliers fairly.

Worthington Industries includes suppliers in their company philosophy:¹

- We cannot operate profitably without those who supply the quality materials we need.
- We ask that suppliers be competitive in the marketplace with regard to quality, pricing, delivery and volume purchased.
- We are a loyal customer to suppliers who meet our quality and service requirements through all market conditions.

Great organizations also recognize their communities as stakeholders. No doubt the success, or failure, of many communities is directly tied the organizations located within its boundaries. If the organizations grow, so does the community. And if an organization fails, or moves elsewhere, the community suffers.

But why, you might ask would an organization want to maximize the value of its community? Some see it is a duty, a social responsibility. While others see it as even more, a part of maximizing the value of all stakeholders: the shareholders, employees, customers, and suppliers who live in the community.

Who are your organization’s stakeholders? Does it believe in maximizing their value? Or is it focused only on *maximizing shareholder value (a myth)*?

We believe, and we hope you now do too, that *putting shareholders first harms investors, corporations, and the public.*

- 1 <http://www.worthingtonindustries.com/Company/About-Worthington-Industries/Our-Philosophy>

Maximizing Stakeholder Value – Customers

We began the week writing about *The Shareholder Value Myth* and proposing a new purpose for organizations – *maximizing stakeholder value*. Today we are discussing the customer as a stakeholder.

“There is only one boss. The customer. And he can fire everybody in the company from the chairman on down, simply by spending his money elsewhere.” - Sam Walton

Many do not think of the customer as the boss. Nor do they think of customers as stakeholders, but they are. Their “stake,” interest, or concern in any organization is that they continue to receive the goods and services they desire in a way that maximizes their interests.

And it is in the best interests of any organization and its people to maximize the value of their customers. And that means attracting, retaining, investing in, and engaging them. Maximizing what is often called a customer’s “lifetime value” to an organization.

Like our employees, we must also invest in our customers. This means researching what they want to buy (now and in the future), not what the organization wants to sell. Then, timely developing the products, or services the customer wants (at a reasonable cost).

And like our employees, we must engage our customers. As we have learned (and discussed), a satisfied employee may not be engaged. The same is true for our customers (stakeholders).

No matter how satisfied a customer may be, they are likely to leave if someone else offers them a better, or more convenient, “deal” (price matters). But an engaged customer tends to stay (return), feeling a bond with the organization and its people (the relationship matters).

Some may say the interests of the shareholders and employees will always be in conflict with those of the customer. We disagree.

Maximizing “lifetime” customer value provides the greatest (long-term) return to the shareholders and the greatest amount of “wages” for the employees.

“It is not the employer who pays the wages – he only handles the money. It is the product that pays wages.” - Henry Ford

What will you do today to maximize the “lifetime” value of your customer (stakeholder)?

My Leadership Philosophy

Written by Ron Morgan, a dedicated reader of our Leadership Minutes

When I went to lead Searle Pharmaceuticals' IT organization, the team wanted to know my leadership philosophy.

So I went to that philosophy guru Robert Fulgham who wrote "*All I really need to know I learned in Kindergarten.*" I spent time elaborating on each of these but here's my list from that book:

- Share Everything
- Play Fair
- Don't Hit People
- Clean up your own mess
- Say you're sorry when you hurt somebody
- Put things back where you found them
- Live a balanced life
- Be aware of wonder

Thanks Ron.

Written by Ray Mazzotta with The Nolan Company, former CEO of OHIC Insurance Company and Chief Operating Officer Ohio BWC.

Listening to General McCarthy at the March 17th Leadership Hour gave me the extra motivation to write this article – good leaders do what it takes to prepare their people to succeed.

Preparation or practice is not always popular and is seldom fun. It can be repetitive, tedious and frustrating. A good leader knows that life isn't a popularity contest and the payoff is seeing their people almost unconsciously execute the plan.

Practice has been a part of the military for a long time. They recognize that front line people will be faced with decisions to make when they are alone or "beyond the reach of supervision," as General McCarthy put it. There won't be time to ask for help or check with someone of higher rank; that person will have to act and rely on their experience and training.

Over 100 million people watching this year's Super Bowl witnessed a spectacular ending and a shining example of the value of practice and leadership. Seattle was one yard away from taking the lead and winning the game in the closing seconds. With the clock running down, Seattle called a pass play that they liked to run. An undrafted rookie for the New England Patriots, named Malcolm Butler, recognized the formation from the many hours Coach Belichick simulated this play on the practice field. Butler instantly stepped in, "jumped the pass route," intercepted the ball and sealed victory for his team. His action took less than two seconds. There was no time to seek out a supervisor. He was clearly "beyond their reach"; he acted as he was trained from hours on the practice field.

After the game when Pete Carroll (coach of the losing Seattle Seahawks) was asked why the play didn't work, his reply was "their guy wasn't supposed to be there." Malcom Butler's response was, "I just did my job." Coach Belichick actually smiled.

These "moments of truth" can occur in any organization. Are your people trained, have they "practiced" for their moment?

Qualitative Leadership

In last week's IMPACT Leadership Minute, we referenced the qualitative research performed by Professor Tom Carney. And we promised (in a footnote) another Leadership Minute to follow based on his qualitative approach.

As Tom described the concept, qualitative research is based on not forming any hypothesis (proposed answer) until thoroughly listening to people. In the traditional quantitative approach, a hypothesis is formed at the beginning and research conducted to prove, or disprove, the hypothesis.

We believe the concept can be applied to leadership.

Many, in leadership positions, seem to take the more 'traditional' approach. They make their hypothesis (decision) and then conduct 'research' to prove themselves right (often not listening to conflicting opinions).

In qualitative leadership, a hypothesis is not formed (a decision not made) until the leader thoroughly listens to all relevant input (research).

Practice your qualitative leadership today.

Reputation – Your Most Valuable Asset

Bill Lhota's (former President COTA and AEP Executive, currently Board Chair for QICParc and CampusParc and a Ross Leadership Founder) presentation on *Leadership Ethics* last week at Otterbein focused on "doing the right thing." If you were there, you know there is a big difference between saying it and doing it?

Bill discussed the differences between compliance ethics (the force of law) and aspirational ethics (personal and organizational), as well as effective compliance programs and how they help in determining "what is the right thing?"

Applying ethics to leadership, here's how Bill defined Ethical Leadership:

- Doing the right thing, but doing it in a way that encourages others to follow suit.
- Communicating the importance of leadership.
- Abiding by company standards.
- Supporting employees in doing the right thing.

- Holding accountable those who don't.

If you were unable to be there you can watch it by clicking here. <https://youtu.be/1K5-uWAXpMk> Look for a “surprise” that will reinforce everything Bill says. It makes the video well worth watching.

And if you believe, like Bill does that, your reputation is your most valuable asset, you might want to forward the link to others.

Snookered

Most of our readers grew up with computers and video games so few might remember the pocket billiards game – Snooker. In the game one could be snookered – led into a situation where the only choices you have are undesirable.

While you may have never played the pocket billiards version, we expect you have been snookered in real life – led into a situation where it seems your only choices are undesirable. It might have been your boss, or someone else you work with that lead you to that point. No matter the source, you were snookered.

What can you do?

Some, not wanting to admit someone got the “better of them” will reluctantly choose an undesirable alternative. Perhaps the “least” undesirable one.

But, others will realize being snookered in just another form of a mistake. The best thing to do is to admit it, correct it, and learn from it. We think that’s getting the “better of the situation.”

What about you? What do you (or would you) do if put in a position of only undesirable choices? Do you make the only “right” decision – admit it, correct it, and learn from it?

Whatever your choice, you now have a name for it – snookered.

TBH and WADR (A Response)

Last week’s Leadership Minute *With All Due Respect* generated more than the usual responses. Here’s one from a loyal reader and contributor Tim Jameson, Director, Learning & Development, Worthington Industries.

“With All Due Respect” is one of those phrases that have become ubiquitous, like “to be honest”. TBH implies “I’ve not been honest up to this point” and WADR has come to imply “I’m going to be blunt and disagree with you and I hope you don’t get mad”.

The trick to avoiding feeling compelled to use this phrase lays in the *pre-work*...the relationships of trust, respect and *safety for candor* we establish. I sometimes refer to trust as “relationship equity”, something that can be built up and used at a later date.

Feeling the need to use the phrase indicates trust has not been established. It also says to me that I am not skilled enough framing a message with both candor and respect that I need to issue a disclaimer at the beginning.

For a leader, we should be less concerned about feeling the need to use the WADR phrase ourselves, although finding a less hackneyed way of expressing it might be a nice change. I'm more concerned if people feel compelled to use it when *speaking to us*. That indicates that we have not created the necessary safety and trust for our people to disagree without fear of repercussion.

That's something we can have an immediate impact on.

Thanks Tim.

The Critical Mass

As we completed our draft of *We Leadership*¹ we had to ask ourselves – *How will an organization know when it has created a 'We Leadership' culture?*

One where people know the answers to these questions:

- ✓ Where are “we” going?
- ✓ Why are “we” going there?
- ✓ What roles will “we” play?
- ✓ What results will “we” share?
- ✓ What principles and values will “we” not compromise?

Our answer – when it has reached a “critical mass.”

In physics, a critical mass might be defined² as - the minimum amount needed to sustain a (nuclear) reaction at a constant rate.

In *We Leadership*, we define a critical mass as - the minimum amount of people needed who share the organization's philosophy to create momentum (sustained speed and the concentration of resources). For most organizations it requires fundamental change.

Does a critical mass mean the majority of people share the philosophy? That would depend on the people, their “level” of engagement, where they are (level and location) in the organization, and the organization's leadership.

It starts with leaders choosing the people based on values, investing in those with potential, recognizing and rewarding the right people, and engaging all who want to be while having crucial conversations with those who are not aligned. And it's a never-ending relentless process. What may take years to create (a *We Leadership* culture) can be lost quickly.

“I am not afraid of an army of lions led by a sheep;

I am afraid of an army of sheep led by a lion.”

- Alexander the Great

Has your organization reached a critical mass?

¹ To be published by the Ross Leadership Institute Press in Summer 2015.

² Not being Physicists, we developed this definition based on a composite of definitions.

The Dynamic Workplace

Written by Chuck Meister, Employee Engagement Consultant with Fresh-Strategies and a Leadership Minute reader.

Millennials now represent the largest single generational segment in the workplace. They comprise 45% of the workforce and will continue to grow as a segment. Their impact on the workplace is dramatic.

There are several major areas that differentiate Millennials from previous generations. According to numerous surveys flexibility of hours and the ability to telework are more important than salary.

They are more civic minded, both locally and globally than other generations. Alignment with the purpose and values of the organization is critical.

In search of an interesting career and an opportunity to grow and develop, Millennials may only stay with a company 2-3 years while the overall average is 4.5 years.

This changing landscape in the workforce presents real challenges and opportunities for leaders and employees to accomplish great things together in the future.

What are you doing to lead Millennials?

The Shareholder Value Myth

We have all heard it – the shareholders own the corporation and as a result the purpose of any corporation is to maximize shareholder value. We have heard it from corporations, investors, boards, and CEOs, as well as from college professors.

Many believe it is written in the law. But it isn't. Not according to Lynn Stout, legal scholar and author of *The Shareholder Value Myth*. At a recent meeting our Ross Leadership Institute Founders and guests discussed her book and agreed with her conclusion – *putting shareholders first harms investors, corporations, and the public*.

How has the myth gained such widespread acceptance? Because it's a simple focus, easily understood, and followed. But it's also wrong (says the author and our Founders). It leads to bad (often short term) decisions that can harm not only shareholders (taken as a whole), but other corporate stakeholders as well – employees, customers, suppliers, and the community.

That's what leads us to another purpose for organizations – to maximize stakeholder value. It's more complex, involving more people, generally longer term, measured with different metrics. But it is also more rewarding.

Because it's complex, it will take more than one (leadership) minute to explain it. That's why we will start today discussing shareholders, followed over the next few days with other stakeholders (employees, customers, suppliers, and the community).

One reason maximizing shareholder value is a myth is because there is seldom one like-minded shareholder. People invest in organizations for many different reasons, ranging from very quick gains, to shorter-term savings (funds for college, for example), to providing money for retirement.

For an organization's leadership, maximizing the value for the short-term shareholder could mean selling the company to the highest bidder (even if it meant closing some of the operations, laying people off, or dropping product lines). While maximizing long-term value could mean expanding operations, investing in R&D, temporarily reducing profits, to build for the future.

Consider another example - shareholders who see the maximum value would be achieved by selling the company in parts (which could alter its basic purpose). It might seem logical, at first.

But consider that the value of the parts of many automobiles is worth more than the car itself. Selling it for parts may maximize your value, but it won't get you to work.

What's your organization's purpose – *maximizing shareholders or stakeholders value?*

We Are Not Sorry

Our recent Leadership Minute *Saying Sorry When You Are Not Wrong* prompted some very interesting and opposite viewpoints. We are not sorry that some of you disagreed with us.

That's one of the reasons we write our Leadership Minutes – to get you to think, even if it means disagreeing with what we write.

Your responses made us think. Is saying sorry the same as admitting you are wrong? Would it be better to express regrets instead of saying you are sorry? Isn't it better to correct the situation than to just say you are sorry?

Or is saying you are sorry only stating an emotion, not an admission of guilt? What do we think? More importantly, what do you think? And most important – you think.

Thinking about what you read (hear, or see) is how you practice your leadership.

Thank you for practicing your leadership with us by thinking about what we write.

And, we are sorry that the last sentence in *Saying You Are Sorry When You Are Not Wrong* contained a grammatical error. We were wrong and we are sorry.

Which Best?

We all have been told to do our best, but which best? Do you do the best you can do, or do you do what's best for you? Often they are the same, but when they differ it becomes a test of leadership.

Consider this example – the Columbus Blue Jackets. In the season that just ended they suffered the highest number of players lost due to injuries in the National Hockey League. By March their chance of making it to the playoffs was just about over.

Many said what was best for them was to lose, to finish last in the standings so they would have the first pick in the upcoming player draft. That would have been easy. They had a good excuse.

But what did they do? With some of their top players returning from injuries they went on a record breaking winning streak. Did they make it to the playoffs? No, that wasn't possible. But they did the best they could do, even though it wasn't the best thing for them.

That is a great example of leadership.

Here are some examples of people who are doing what they think is best for them; those who don't say anything about a bad system, or process because it might upset those in charge; people who don't work as hard as they can because they don't want to be looked upon unfavorably by those who aren't working; people who see others treated unfairly, but do nothing, say nothing that would draw negative attention to themselves; those in leadership positions who make decisions that maximize their compensation even if it means the organization and the rest of the people are negatively impacted.

These are all examples of leadership failures. There are many more examples of people who choose what's best for them over doing their best. They may have good excuses.

Which best will you choose today, the best for you, or the best you can do? Hopefully, they are the same. But when they aren't it's a test of your leadership.

With All Due Respect

We find it interesting that when people disagree they often start by saying – *With all due respect.*

We think the respect goes both ways. The person disagreeing respects the other person and (hopefully) the other person respects the person who disagrees. If not, no matter how the comment is framed, it's unlikely it will have the desired impact – to make people think.

So it might be better to say – *Assuming we respect each other's opinions.* If the assumption is wrong, the ensuing discussion will most likely not be productive.

What do you think? You can assume we respect your opinions.

