

Food For Thought

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The Inverse Square Law of Conversations

Food for Thought is our way of sharing interesting concepts on corporate leadership and management with others who might find it useful. The thoughts offered are intended to be controversial and thought provoking. They always follow our motto of helping develop logical leadership.

All of us are probably familiar with people who command attention in group conversations, and with others that shy away from attracting attention to themselves. In a business meeting it is quite common to hear the same opinion of the loud voiced in many different ways before you get a glimpse of the opinion of the quiet. Some of us ourselves are likely to be in one of these two extreme categories. The inverse square law of conversations is a tactical tool to deal with these two extremes in group situations such as meetings.

The law says that the amount of attention one deserves is inversely proportional to the square of the amount of attention one commands. As per this law, one needs to take great efforts to uncover the opinions of the quiet and subdued, recognizing all along that not only do you not have to do that for the loud and outspoken but ignoring them every so often might not be a bad thing. Beware that the law does not pass judgment on the quality of the comments made by either type – just that you are likely to hear the comments of the loud, and are likely to miss the comments of the quiet.

There are a few corollaries to this law that deserve mention. First, those that command attention will express their views even in the face of established dissenting opinions. Conversely, the second corollary states that those that avoid attention require group support of their opinion to make them comfortable expressing it. While there are certainly exceptions to these corollaries, they are by and large true in most situations. The moral of these corollaries is that it is OK to attack the opinion of the outspoken, but one must be careful expressing judgment of the opinions of the withdrawn.

The final corollary is that those that command attention must either refrain from serving as the chair of conversations or adopt a quiet demeanor when serving as chair. So, for example, the chair should strive to provide as much airtime for each of the opinions in the room, quite independent of their own personal opinion.

It is probably wise for the chair to hold his or her personal opinion silent until such time as it needs to be revealed. When at the end of the meeting you wish to go around the room and seek each person's conclusion of the topic discussed, it is inadvisable to go around the room in the physical order of their seating. Instead, the chair is better advised to seek the opinions of the quiet before they get around to the more outspoken.

While much of this might appear to be common sense, think about the law overtly the next time you are in a meeting. You will find yourself behaving differently, not in terms of how you express your opinions, but rather in terms of how you receive others' opinions. Finally, if you are wondering why it is called the "inverse square law" rather than just the "inverse law," give us a call for more explanation. We would love to discuss other ramifications of this law with you.

We have received many responses to our Food for Thought mailings, asking if you can freely share and forward these thoughts. Indeed you can. All we ask is that a clear attribution to LogiStyle and our contact information are included. For the interested reader, we have archived some of our recent Food for Thought mailings at our website, and can be viewed at [LogiStyle: Food for Thought Archive](#). As always, we welcome your comments. We hope your business is doing well. If we can be of any assistance please feel free to call – even, if just to chat.

Best Regards,

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