PAGE Audio #4 Script

This script is from the ICON9 Learn As You Go Audio series.

Welcome to the final example for the PAGE tool in the ICON9 learn as you go audio series.

In this example, we again look at the use of PAGE in a *reactive* or *defensive* mode, checking that the person leading the meeting covers all the essential points captured in PAGE, and behaving appropriately if not.

In this example I'm going with my boss and another colleague to visit a customer for a regular update meeting. We are expecting about 6 of them to attend - the project leader and team. On this occasion, however, the client has been having problems with one of our recent product releases and this is going to be an important discussion topic. Nevertheless, it is still only one topic among many and our objectives include delivering a progress report (which contains a number of very positive items that we like the customer to hear about), finding out what progress the customer has made on a joint project, and a couple of more ambitious items. Most important of these is to negotiate a stricter process specification changes, because late changes our impact on our work.

Unfortunately, after a few greetings, the meeting starts as follows. The project leader asks one of their guys to get up and list the issues they're having with our software. Once the problems have been enumerated, they then launch into the discussion by saying, "Let's start with the parasitic reset problem. What's that all about?".

There are a couple of difficulties in this situation. Firstly, I am not the most senior person present in my team and so, assuming I realize that the meeting is starting without being adequately structured, it is difficult for me to do anything about it without breaking the normal conventions of hierarchy.

Secondly, if a client is in pain – as this one seems to be – it is important to deal with the pain points first.

These points notwithstanding, if I allow yourself to immediately get sucked into a debate about what went wrong and how to fix it, it's unlikely that I will meet my meeting objectives, and it's not even certain that the debate will successfully deal with the client's issues.

So what on Earth do I do?

The best case scenario is that my team is well prepared for the meeting with a MAP and a PAGE and that we agreed our respective roles. Furthermore, we should have heard about the client problems before the meeting and corresponded about them.

If we've done all this, then I probably won't be surprised by the turn of events. In response to the client's opening gambit, and if no one else team gets there first, I might try to influence events by saying something like, "Yes, that does look like the most important issue. We've done some work on it, and on the other problems, and have some answers prepared. It might make sense to start with an overview …"

Now, this is fairly light, since my intention is not to impose my own agenda. Rather, it's a ploy to gain some time. Perhaps my boss will step in and support this idea? This seems likely, since we did get in sync during the pre-meeting preparation.

The key point is to slow things down and create space for a short conversation about how the

work of the meeting will proceed. Having my team's PAGE as a reference will make this easier.

That's the best case scenario. The worst one is that I arrive in the meeting having done no preparation and everything that my client comes up with is a complete surprise. Of course, dear listener, this has never happened to me, and I'm sure not to you either but, just theoretically, let's think about what could be done.

Again, it's going to be important to slow things down a bit. The worst thing I could do would be to try to immediately answer every question that was thrown at me. Instead of doing this, I should use Discovery as much as possible, and we'll look into the advantages of this approach and techniques for doing it in the modules on the DISCOVER-Y tool.

Having acknowledged the gravity of the situation, questions that might help are:

"How do you want us to work on this? Should we try to cover all the issues this afternoon, or do you want to focus the discussion on a couple of key ones? How much time does everyone have? Apart from these problems, are there other things that you would like to discuss this afternoon? - I have a couple of points, if there is time …", and so on. In other words, say anything that comes to mind at a level of abstraction *above* the detail of the issues raised. We'll get down into that detail soon enough!

So that's my example, and it was a long one! When it comes to surviving highly – charged meetings, there are no miracle solutions. Just a few fundamentals – such as those captured in the PAGE acronym – and some techniques to bear in mind, such as playing for time, especially through the use of good Discovery.

For your example, it might help to think back to a significant meeting that got out of control due to poor meeting management by somebody. What was the context and who was there?
<pause>

How, in your opinion, should the person who managed the meeting have ideally behaved?
<pause>

What did they actually do that caused the encounter to go badly?
<pause>

In retrospect, what might *you* have done to influence the meeting in a positive way early on?
<pause>

What could have been the benefits of your intervention, had you made one?
<pause>

Is there anything that could have been done before the meeting that would have helped?
<pause>

There you go! Isn't hindsight a wonderful thing? Of course, I'm not encouraging you to dwell on past mistakes. Quite the opposite. I strongly believe that analyzing past experiences in a detached way makes us better prepared to deal with the future. Even if we don't get it right next time either, we'll be more lucid observers and better reporters of client encounters.

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