

MEDIATE THIS !

HOW TO TALK ABOUT LOUD TALK (AND NOT BE A CRANK)

BY STEVEN P. DINKIN

Dear Mediator:

I work in an open office layout, and some of my colleagues use the speaker settings when talking on their desktop phones, which means everyone around them has to listen to both sides of their conversations. It really makes it hard to concentrate on my work, especially when they turn the volume up. I've thought about doing it myself just to show how annoying it is. If I say something to these co-workers, I'll be labeled as the office crank. What should I do?

Craving Quiet in Kearny Mesa

Dear Craving:

This year marks the 60th anniversary of the open workspace movement, so this is the perfect time to ponder how a design concept meant to nurture teamwork has managed to stir up so much strife.

When brothers Wolfgang and Eberhard Schnelle launched the Quickborne space planning firm in 1958 in Hamburg, Germany, they thought that removing interior boundaries could help workers collaborate more freely. To encourage intellectual flow, the Schnelles invented an open plan floor arrangement called "Bürolandschaft," a German term

for "office landscape."

Six decades later, the world of work is coming to terms with a truth familiar to mediators: Boundaries have value because they carve out the personal space people need to think clearly and function capably.

In theory, we should welcome more opportunities to interact with colleagues. But a harsh reality of office life is that productivity requires concentration. Distracting sounds interrupt mental processing, which is why noise is a chief source of the workplace disputes we mediate.

The Schnelle brothers' innovation is now a running gag; a recent Google search for "open plan office jokes" yielded 42.6 million hits, including "24 Reasons Your Open-Office Plan Sucks." But after decades of investment in open workspaces, few employers will trade them in.

Leadership teams seem unaware of simmering noise tensions because they don't experience them. After all, most managers are safely ensconced in private cocoons of offices with doors.

So workers in open plans cope with jarring voices as best they can, usually by listening to music through ear buds that are more isolating than physical walls. Fighting noise pollution with



GETTY IMAGES

This week's conflict deals with workers in open office spaces who get loud using their phones' speaker settings for conversations.

noise pollution will only escalate your office war. Communication holds the key to building collegiality. You can stage that discussion with two reliable conflict resolution strategies: extending the benefit of the doubt and reframing the conversation.

Few people who talk loudly on the phone are trying to annoy their colleagues. They are too intent on their immediate needs to consider how their conduct affects others. When such lapses occur, an inclusive "we can recall-

brate this" overture works better than an accusatory "you are a problem" approach.

You're right that complaining about noise might make you seem grouchy. So consider reframing the discussion to focus on a more urgent concern about privacy and confidentiality, particularly for people who would be appalled to learn they are being overheard.

Workplace phone conversations regularly involve an exchange of intelligence with and about clients, vendors and stake-

holders. Even without speaker-phones, heedless talkers can disclose sensitive and proprietary information to everyone within earshot.

Your colleagues may insist that they always alert callers about speakerphone use. But it's hard to remember to filter what we say when we are immersed in long, complex conversations.

The risk of violating anyone's privacy makes a ban on office speakerphones a business and legal "best practice." Some employers are developing etiquette guidelines for using mobile phones in designated alcoves to preserve the peace.

And then there are the "phone-less phone booths" cropping up as first-come, first-served private enclosures inside open offices. As recently reported in The Wall Street Journal, these new amenities are already causing strife over alleged booth-hogging. But that's a subject for another column.

Steven P. Dinkin is a professional mediator who has served as president of the San-Diego based National Conflict Resolution Center since 2003. **Do you have a conflict that needs a resolution?** Share your story with The Mediator via email at mediatethis@ncrconline.com or as an online submission by visiting www.ncrconline.com/MediateThis. All submissions will be kept anonymous.

NOTEBOOKS

From Union-Tribune reporting staff

OUTDOORS: ERNIE COWAN

Pleasant surprises await in desert

I was enjoying a solitary stroll along the ragged edge of creation when I realized I had wandered into a miniature forest.

It was a scene I would expect much closer to spring, but not in the normally dusty desert sands of December. Apparently recent rains have started the miraculous transformation that could bring abundant wildflowers to this arid wilderness.

Hope springs eternal for the veteran desert rat.

I was lost in thought as the late afternoon sun dipped to the western horizon. It would soon slip behind the San Ysidro Mountains, ending another beautiful day.

My hike was along the Ocotillo Rim, that broken line of earth created when earthquakes and uplifting shifted large plates of land to create what we now call the Borrego Badlands.

Most notable as part of this formation is Font's Point, the iconic apex of the Ocotillo Rim and one of Anza-Borrego Desert State Park's most visited places.

My stroll was along a less visited portion of the rim near Vista del Malpais. This is a stark and generally barren place where the broken earth has eroded into a maze of curdled landscape.

Winter rains, however, can bring a spring transformation with tiny plants pushing through the crust of desert sand in a brilliant show of purple, yellow, white and red.

But this was early December, and the tiny forest I was seeing were desert lilies nearly mature and about ready to push up their sturdy stalks that will soon be covered with large, intricate white blossoms. Nearby there were actually beavertail cactus already sporting silky magenta flowers.

I don't recall seeing so many plants nearing maturity in early December. This generally happens in February, ideally after several winter storms have spilled over the mountains to bring moisture to the desert.

I'm not sure Borrego is ready for a repeat of the Super Bloom two winters ago. It was a year of extraordinary desert rainfall and the clash of social media that brought hundreds of thousands to the tiny desert community of Borrego Springs.

But it was also one of the most spectacular desert spring wildflower displays in 20 years, and for veteran desert rats, that's something we always hope for.

My encounter with this vigorous crop of desert lilies gave me hope that spring will be



ERNIE COWAN

Desert lilies have been spotted recently in the Anza-Borrego desert.

another year of beauty in the desert. Hope is cheap. Reality is bit more difficult and will require the ideal combination of rainfall, temperatures and gentle winds.

As I continued my hike, I was now tuned in to the sparse vegetation. In addition to the desert lily clusters, there were lupines already well formed, and the few ocotillos standing sentinel were wearing a thick sweater of green leaves. Soon the tips would ignite with clusters of fiery red flowers. It was clear that this particular area, at least, had been drenched by recent rains.

It's too early to predict the spring wildflower show, but seeing plants growing this early is a good sign.

The ideal scenario will bring gentle storms spaced over a few weeks during the winter months. This will allow plants to begin growing and be nurtured by additional rainfall.

As winter transitions to spring, temperatures are important. Sudden or sustained heat spells can wilt or destroy the delicate emerging wildflower blossoms.

Nature is a wonderful architect and one reason a spectacular wildflower season is so special is the fact it doesn't happen every year.

While we hope for that combination of water, wind and temperature to be ideal, most years it's not perfect.

Even on the imperfect years, however, there is beauty to be found. The super blooms will blind you with color. Large carpets of verbena will paint the desert purple.

To follow the spring wildflower bloom, check with the Anza-Borrego Wildflower Hotline at (760) 767-4684.

Email ernie@packtrain.com

THE READERS' REPRESENTATIVE: ADRIAN VORE

Readers offer feedback on stories

Newspaper readers, whether they prefer print or the digital edition, are serious consumers news. Their perspectives on the news report are much appreciated. This week the Readers' Representative column presents some of that feedback.

'Tale' perceived as disrespectful

Richard Bruce of Kensington emailed the Readers' Rep over a word in a photo caption that appeared on B1 Monday. The photo showed dancers from Our Lady of Guadalupe Catholic Church in Chula Vista participating last Sunday in a procession in San Diego to honor Our Lady of Guadalupe. The caption referred to Mary "and the tale of her appearing in the Villa de Guadalupe in the 1500s."

Bruce said the word "tale" was a poor choice. "Most, if not all, readers think of the word to mean a fictitious or imaginary event."

He said the result is a "belittling" of the participants' religion. "There were many other choices of words," he said.

Webster's New World College Dictionary defines tale as "a story or account of true ... events," but the definition also includes "legendary or fictitious events."

I agree with Bruce. I think "tale" primarily evokes an image of something made up, and its use in the caption could be interpreted as a dig, however unintentional, at a religion.

Location should be known quickly

Vic Turner from Tierrasanta said a headline lacked precision, and as a result was misleading.

The headline ran on the front page Nov. 28. It read "Mayor: Resources for shelter nearly tapped." He said he immediately thought it referred to San Diego Mayor Kevin Faulconer and his plan for homeless shelters.

"Only after reading the smaller headlines did I realize the stories were about the Tijuana mayor (Juan Manuel Gastelum) and shelter for the migrants in the caravan," Turner wrote. "I think that when simply having MAYOR in a headline, the default assumption should be that it is the San Diego mayor, as the paper is The San Diego Union-Tribune. The confusion is not limited to this story either. From time to time the local section will have headlines with 'Mayor' or 'City' and the articles are

not about San Diego but El Cajon or Oceanside or somewhere else in the county. I'd like to see more precision in these cases."

Turner is right. Editors and reporters need to keep this mind. They should avoid writing just "San Diego," for instance, when the reference is actually the county. Headlines should also try to include a location.

Readers, I think, should quickly be able to identify the "where" in a news account.

Origin of word Santa Anas

Reader Ted Hilton from San Diego wrote to add more about an item in this column that ran Nov. 18. The item said the name "Santa Ana winds" is derived from the Santa Ana Canyon, one of the places where the winds blast through. Hilton said that is incorrect.

"Santa Ana" resulted from a Spanish word that was mispronounced, he said.

"The Native American Indians were saying 'Satana,' or Satan, also meaning 'winds of the devil' to warn settlers of the danger," Hilton wrote. ... "The Spanish word, Satana, was also misheard to be Santana. In Northern California many of the winds are referred to as 'Diable' or devil winds. Yes, the original meaning of the winds pertain to devils and Satan."

Hilton pointed to a Los Angeles Almanac article. "Santa Ana Winds and Santana Winds are both an old but probably mistaken misinterpretation or mispronunciation of what the winds were originally called," the article said. "These superhot winds are far too widespread to be realistically attributed to just the Santa Ana Canyon."

Another article I found from the San Diego Historical Society Quarterly from January 1958 settled on the origin of the word being from a geographical source — the Santa Ana Canyon.

A definitive answer on the origin probably can't be reached. "Santa Ana" in reference to the winds has appeared in writings since the 1880s.

The name is the accepted term in news stories for the hot winds that fuel so much destruction in Southern California. However, Hilton makes a strong argument for the origin of the word being "satana," and not the Santa Ana Canyon.

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FROM THE ARCHIVES | LOOKING BACK OVER 150 YEARS

JOHN LENNON SHOT DEAD

The San Diego Union-Tribune will mark its 150th anniversary in 2018 by presenting a significant front page from the archives each day throughout the year.

Tuesday, Dec. 9, 1980

In 1980, John Lennon was shot to death outside his New York City apartment building by an apparently deranged stalker. Fans around the world paid tribute to the legacy of Lennon and the Beatles, including The Union's Robert P. Laurence.

Here are the first few paragraphs of the story:

JOHN LENNON SLAIN

LARGER THAN LIFE

Lennon And His Beatle Mates: A Towering Symbol Of 1960s

By Robert P. Laurence, Entertainment Writer, The San Diego Union
John was the smart one.
Paul was the cute one.
George was the poetic one.
Ringo was the lovable one.

Together they were the Beatles, the most potent musical force that rock 'n' roll has yet produced, a magical blend of human chemistry that began as a pop fad, won musical respectability, and eventually became so towering a symbol of the 1960s that they eventually seemed larger than the decade itself.

When the news came over the wires last night that John Lennon had been killed, the

reactions of reporters and editors was more than professional, it was deeply personal.

"I feel like I've been hit," said one.
"Something's been taken out of me," said another.

And indeed something had been taken out of all of us. For John Lennon — and Paul McCartney and George Harrison and Ringo Starr — were much more than rock musicians. They were a part of us. Though they might live to 100, they would always be the Beatles, the four young lads from Liverpool who gave a new joy to pop music and before they were done revolutionized it.

And though only one of them is dead now,



we know this means the Beatles are dead. For without any one of them, the Beatles are no more. Yes, we know that they broke up a decade ago, and that Lennon and the others had said many times there would never be a reunion. Still, as long as they all lived, the Beatles lived. But with one of the four gone, the Beatles are gone, and with them a piece of our lives.

No one would ever forget seeing them on television's "Ed Sullivan Show," just as I will never forget seeing them one magical night in San Francisco's Candlestick Park, when they played for perhaps half an hour, dressed in those absurd little Edwardian velvet suits, then dashed from the stage set up at second base to a waiting armored car and disap-

peared forever.

We thought they were a new group with a new sound, taking music out of the doldrums and the tediousness that had burdened it for the last several years. We thought their gift was one of a new vitality and freshness. But they weren't new, not even then. For when "I Want to Hold Your Hand" became a hit in the United States in 1964, John Lennon and Paul McCartney had already been performing music together for seven years.

Lennon was 17, McCartney 15, when in 1957 they first played together as the "Nurk Twins." In 1958, Lennon, McCartney and Harrison played together as the "Quarrymen." By 1960 they were "Johnny and the Moondogs," later the "Silver Beatles," playing behind a striptease act at Liverpool's Cavern Club. Ringo joined up in 1962.

"Where did you get your name?" the reporters asked them many times.

"A great beast arose from the sea," intoned John with great solemnity, "and said, 'You're Beatles with an A.'"

"What will you do when all this fuss is over?" the press asked at the height of Beatlemania.

"We'll just sit on our yacht and mope," was Ringo's offhanded reply.

We loved them for that, for their wit and irreverence, for their refusal to take things too seriously. They kidded everyone, they kidded themselves.

They even kidded Queen Elizabeth. "Her Majesty's a pretty nice girl," Paul sang gaily on a short track at the end of the "Abbey Road" album, "but she doesn't have a lot to say."

ONLINE: View this and other anniversary front pages online at sandiegouniontribune.com/150-years.