

Transcription - Asking For Help As The Subject Matter Expert

Welcome back. I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn. This is Inside Exec. Today we're going to try and answer a question from a listener and that is about asking for help when you are the subject matter expert and you feel that you need some assistance.

Now this might be because you still know the topic and you know it well, but the service that you need to perform requires more than one person to do it. And you know that the organization has vested all of their trust and interest in you doing it as the subject matter expert. But you feel that it needs additional resources, whether it's someone because there are things that you can't do or you don't understand or it's just simply almost a clone of you because there is too much for one person to do. So we're going to look at that.

So, if you're the subject matter expert Fulyana, I know you will ask for help. But there are some people that aren't as forward as you are about requesting assistance. So let's talk about the general population. How would they ask for help? And they're the subject matter expert.

Well, being a subject matter expert, it doesn't mean you can work in isolation anyway. I think that there are two very, very clear points that come out, firstly you cannot have single person dependencies. It's not good. So even if you are and if you're the only subject matter expert, then you need to have someone who you are grooming or growing to do that. So it's the succession planning so that person can serve two purposes. One is the extra person working with you. You help shape their chosen career path, if you like, etcetera, but never underestimate that you can get help from across the whole organization. You don't need to have a title or to say their duties requires them to help this unit and that unit because you're the subject matter expert, people will come to you for guidance, advice etcetera.

But you've got to deliver that to the people who are gonna be the users, whether it's the knowledge that will be translated to the front line, the middle office, the back office, whatever it is. So in a sense, you're working with all those teams and you will choose one or two in those teams, by building relationships, by building rapport with the managers of those areas and by identifying people that will work with you on, if you like, a project by project basis, if you want to look at it that way. So before you know it within the organization, I would have about 15 people working for me when they don't actually work for me. And to me that's more powerful because it's not about needing assistance but about arms and legs.

So the only one that I would say it must have is succession planning because that knowledge can't be left with one person. What about when that person goes on leave unexpectedly? All of those things. So to me building the relationships, building the expertise and if the expertise is so specialized then what about external? So who would you go to? Do you have a list of suppliers or consultants that you will go to for this sort of thing?

You know that even for yourself because you can't be expert at every single aspect. So you might use external resources because that's cheaper. That is better to use it as you need it, there might be legal, it might be compliance, it might be whatever it is you call on those, so have a methodology where you have, in this case you would go this way, so when you're not there, somebody else can pick it up and go with it and especially the person that you are using for succession planning purposes.

All of that is very relevant. And I'm just going to expand on a little bit firstly, I think that you need to take on the understanding that you are the subject matter expert. And so whatever you say, whatever you ask for is what the organization will do because as you feel already they have trusted you. They have trusted their interests in you being the subject matter expert and as the subject matter expert, you are in control of this subject, this activity, whatever it is. Certainly identify within the organization in terms of succession planning or training people up or showing them what you're doing, have what you're doing documented as well.

But also look to external staff because I can say from my experience in the last two weeks, I hosted a national convention and in that sense, I was the subject matter expert for the way that we were doing the convention and I knew that I could not possibly do it all on my own. And there was no one in the organization who could take on the role who was prepared to learn it, who was interested in learning it. They just wanted the end result, the convention itself.

And so I had to look externally and I looked completely independently from this country, from the industry, across the board, someone completely independent and as the subject matter expert, I am the best person to choose that extra resource. And so I went to an online provider and I looked through all of the people who were saying they could do the things that I needed done and I chose someone, had a meeting with them and we worked out how it would happen and I was really completely satisfied with the service that was provided and had I not been able to host for any reason I know that this other person would have taken

over and did take over in a couple of sessions just so we could see that it was going to happen and the organization would never have known in some cases that the other person was doing the hosting instead of me.

But what that did for the organization was introduce them to another resource that has worked with them now successfully under my supervision and now they're comfortable that if I'm not available for whatever reason, that they have somewhere else they can go to, they don't have to panic and you know, what are we gonna do? We just won't do it because we haven't got a subject matter expert. They are out there, they might not necessarily be in your industry, in this country, in your time zone, whatever else it is, but they are out there and they are prepared to work for you. So obviously they get clear instructions. So it's about, in terms of you being a subject matter expert, it's being very clear that you're the expert and so you're in control. It's about having that succession plan, whether it's internal or external, it's having your process or your framework documented so that whatever happens, someone can step into that role from wherever and take over.

So it's not about asking for help. It's about determining the plan of action and the way you're going to work and you just present it to your organization and you say, well, you've made me the subject matter expert. You want me to do this, here is my plan. Just so it's clear, I'm not asking for your approval. I'm just telling you that this is what's going to happen. So at this point, I feel that I might need assistance. So this is how I'm going to go about getting it. This is what it's gonna cost you, all of those things. So that the communication is clear. The framework is clear and the process is clear.

I just want to repeat a word that you used, which is really key. The result is seamless. So when you were not there, the person came in and it was seamless. They didn't even know, you said. And that to me is really, really good. So, the recipient of that service has got first class service and whether it was you delivering it or the other person, because you've managed so well in the planning stage and knowledge transfer or knowledge sharing, whatever you want to call it. And so it was seamless. And that's really, really important. Just to reiterate, you're not asking for help. You're just setting out the guidelines of how you're going to perform this task as the subject matter expert.

That's our answer. If you are listening and you have been in this situation, we'd be delighted to hear from you so we can share how you've addressed it in your particular situation. But for now I'm Kim Baillie, she's Fulyana Orsborn, this is Inside Exec.

