

The Importance of Invitations for Venusian Morale

By Dr. Robert Schwarz

Senior Martian managers of a major engineering department reported to me that they just could not understand why the more junior women kept complaining that they felt excluded. One manager, named Al, said to me, "It drives me crazy. I tell everyone that I have an open door policy. If there's a problem, just come in and we will talk. That should be enough!! What else do they want?"

The more I work with companies, the more I have come to realize that the gender differences around what constitutes a proper or meaningful invitation is a significant issue in the workplace. The kind of frustration voiced above by Al is relatively common because men do not understand that the customs on Venus require more specific and personal invitations.

Women, on the other hand, often completely misinterpret a Martian's "minimal invitational" style as well.

Let's look at Al's invitation. The message is: I am open to you coming in if you have a problem or a concern. Al is completely willing to meet with anyone. His door is truly open. But the onus to initiate action is on the other individual. So how does this set with Venusians?

Susan says, "Al has never invited me personally to talk about my concerns. I do not get the message that he is really interested in what I have to say. Now that we are talking about this, I vaguely recall him saying something about an open door policy, but he said that once months ago. He has never checked with me since."

I hear comments like these repeatedly. I was involved in a special meeting with a company's executives, who were to examine why they had so few women in senior management. To have more women at the meeting, key women in mid-management positions were invited to attend a meeting scheduled after lunch. The woman in charge of the meeting (she was very Martian!) did not think to invite these women to have lunch with the executives before the meeting. When the invited female mid-managers discovered this, several felt totally slighted. It was an honest oversight. Despite the overall context, that these women were included in the meeting, the net effect for some of the women was a feeling of exclusion.

The lesson for a Martian manager who wants to increase rapport with and motivation of Venusians is to adjust his communication to fit with Venusian customs as follows:

1) Instead of extending a general invitation for anyone anytime, make a specific invitation to a specific person at a specific time. On Mars, it would be perfectly reasonable to say to a bunch of guys, "I just got

a new HDTV and am going to be watch the Eagles every Sunday. Anyone who wants to come over can." But a Venusian, would never do that. A woman would ask each of her friends, "Susan, we haven't gotten together in a long while, I'd love you to come over on next Saturday at 4pm. Is that good with you?"

2) Inclusive in your invitation, specify that you want to hear about accomplishments or difficulties, or personal goals. Say for instance, "Alexis, I would like to schedule a meeting with you to get your opinions about the new procedures that were implemented last month. I want to know how they are impacting you and your team." Or, "Maria, please come by my office this afternoon for a few minutes to just tell me how things are going for you. What time would be good for you between 2:00 and 4:00?"

3) Remember that in the Venusian culture the whole point is for the one extending the invitation to show proactive interest, motivation and initiative, not just a willingness to respond to an invitee (keep in mind that Al's invitation was based on someone else showing initiative). Another way for men to comprehend this difference is to think about how women give gifts—they usually put a great effort into the wrapping paper, bow and presentation. Martians generally, do not care much about paper or bows, figuring these will go right into the trash. But on Venus, the extra effort in presentation signals that the giver really cares. Martians who “wrap” their invitations with the care of Venusians, will get much better responses.