

Why Poll or Survey?

While polling and surveying have been viewed by many as important information gathering tools for decision making for many years, 2007 and 2008 are transformational years clearly demonstrating a major paradigm shift in the relevance and importance of their use. Polling and surveying became more vital, operational tools both in terms of demonstrating a change in the decision making process and the need for accurate, broad based information to make decisions. Most highly successful executives and decision makers have felt for years the need for people to feel linked and included in the decision making process. The days when people, whether they are customers, employees, citizens, or any other classification, blindly accept autocratic decisions is waning. The words, "I don't listen to polls" are now passé and verboten, signs of an unformed, autocratic person or leader. The old saying, "None of us are as smart as all us", still has resounding truth and issues a mandate to find ways of determine what others think.

If you question this observation, look at the political scene in the United States. Whatever your political party affiliation one must recognize Senator Barak Obama's success. While he appeals to a broad base of the population, his strongest linkage is to the younger generation, today's and tomorrow's customers, employees, or citizens. They identify with his leadership and communication style. Some have labeled him as a listening leader, a leadership style already written about and studied in major business schools. It is an outgrowth of "servant leadership" which has been popular for ten years, but never totally ascribed to by many leaders who viewed the style as a sign of weakness. Similarly, we see leadership writings about changing the focus for "I" to "We" ("DNA of Leadership" by Judith E. Glaser).

What does all of this mean in relation to polling and surveys? If there is a shift from "I" to "We" occurring or listening leadership is the new successful leadership style, then there must be an efficient, effective way to be inclusive, that is to make people feel they are being listened to and very much a part of the process. Many of us have been preaching this for years, but it has fallen on deaf ears. We envision the transformational years of 2007 and 2008 as a milestone for inculcating this concept as a success strategy for leaders.

Organizations conduct surveys and polls to discover answers to issues or certain questions. The questions may be diverse and vary widely depending on what data

driven decisions you will make as a result of the data obtained.

There are 4 critical reasons why organizations conduct surveys or polls:

1. To Discover What's Going On

In a non-threatening survey or poll environment, your organization will learn about what motivates survey or poll respondents and what's important to them.

2. To Provide An Opportunity To Discuss Key, Relevant Topics

Communicating with respondents about your survey or poll topics allows for deeper insight into your survey problem or issue, and can shed light on topics related to your survey or poll problem within a larger context.

3. To Prioritize Actions Based on Objective Data

Rather than relying on subjective "gut" feelings, you can obtain the perspectives of respondents, which in turn is their reality. This will help you make sound data driven decisions.

Therefore, you can immediately address issues that are important, rather than wasting resources on things that are unimportant or not relevant.

4. To Provide a Benchmark

Surveying or polling provides a "snapshot" of your target population and their attitudes about your survey or poll problem. This helps you to establish a baseline from which you can compare whether target population attitudes and perceptions relative to the survey problem are getting better or worse over time. Benchmarking frequently has little relevance when compared to other organizations, but is vital and highly significant when used within an organization or compared to very closely related organizations in very similar environments.

