



## the G-spot

### **Find the field without the goats**

A few months ago, we were working with a client. This particular individual used to be in the Army and served several tours in Afghanistan. We were discussing an organisation's ability to seek and act on relevant insight.

He told us a story about when he was on the ground in Helmand province. They were poring over their intelligence to try and work out where IEDs might be placed. As they were examining their data, a junior member of their unit told them all they needed to do was to 'look for the fields without any goats'.

He went onto explain that he had noticed that whenever they found a site with IEDs, there were mysteriously never any goats on that site. (Goats being the staple livestock in that area.) Clearly what had been happening was that the Taliban fighters would give local farmers a 'heads up' about where the IEDs were being placed so that the farmers could remove their precious source of livelihood.

Organisations today are virtually drowning in data but are so often ineffective in drawing upon the experiences and knowledge of their own 'people on the ground'. Frontline team members are huge reservoirs of information but are either not asked it, or not asked in the right way.

We were working with a large airport once. Our goal was to improve the passenger experience through security. A seemingly straightforward brief and one where a lot of existing data was available around speed of processing, number of rejected items, level of passenger satisfaction etc. The key to the brief was to ensure that passengers were vigilant at removing all their security-sensitive items (e.g., liquids and gels) so that they would not be rejected and have to go back through the system. That would lead to a smoother, faster, and therefore, happier, experience for all.

Despite signs, videos and even holograms, passengers were really not paying attention to what was being asked of them. Having a security officer standing at the front of the queue calling down to passengers to 'remove liquids and gels' also had no real effect.

A member of the security team then happened to say to us, 'you know, if you just speak to one passenger, everyone else leans into listen'. It was an absolute gem of an insight. They were of course, right. No one wants to be the one that is 'in trouble' so if we perceive that a security officer is speaking directly to one person, all our ears prick up and we want to see what they have 'done wrong'.

In other words, if a security officer leans into a passenger and says, seemingly directly to them, 'do you happen to have any liquids or gels in your bags?' – there is a bit of a ripple all around them and everyone takes action. We know this to be true because when we trialled this, the queues moved faster, and satisfaction was higher (30% higher in fact).

These are both apparently small pieces of insight but with big ramifications – particularly in the first story. This is not about dismissing the importance of data, or other more formalised sources of research, it's about using those for the right reasons and not forgetting that sometimes, all you need to do is to look to see (metaphorically) if anyone has moved your goats.

Take action by:

- ◇ Observing your customers and colleagues in real-time.
- ◇ Probing with colleagues about why things do or don't happen – to understand genuine cause and effect.
- ◇ Involve both parties in co-creating possible improvements.
- ◇ Dropping us at line at [hello@signal.cx](mailto:hello@signal.cx). We'd love to bounce some ideas around with you.