

Is it a Difference in Personal Style?

Or is there a Bully in the Office?

After 25 years in the "business of people" as a consultant, educator and mother, I know that sometimes people just don't get along. Getting others to "play nice" isn't always easy. It is estimated that when there is a job to be done and something is impeding progress, more than 85% of the time the solution involves people learning to communicate and interact positively with each other.

"The most important single ingredient in the formula of success is knowing how to get along with people."

- Theodore Roosevelt

Below are three steps toward positive interactions and effective communication designed to move your teams swiftly down the road to success.

Step One: Understand Your Personal Style

"Every advance, every achievement of mankind, has been connected with an advance in self-awareness"- C. G. Jung, Psychological Reflections

The first step to positively interact with others is to understand yourself. Understanding what makes you tick - your likes, dislikes, values, decision-making style, and how you prefer to communicate - is key to understanding others. Effective communication and positive interactions are built on the foundation of understanding self and others.

There are a number of half day and full day workshops that cover personal style, its impact on others and how to recognize style in others. If your team is unable to spend at least half a day gaining insight into personal style, seek out a professional coach who has access to one of the many personality assessments on the market today. Even if you have taken a personality assessment in the past, you will find many benefits in re-evaluating your style. Results offer valuable insight as to how you respond to various situations, and whether your communication skills are effective.

Remember that no assessment can describe the totality of anyone. And, just as important as choosing an assessment is choosing a coach or facilitator who holds people in high regard and is not biased toward "sides" in the organization or team. This person can then guide you through the maze of available assessments and assist you in choosing what is right for you and your situation.

Finally, understanding personal style is not the end-all answer to solving issues. It's much like weight loss; a good program involves a variety of measures to lose weight. The expectation that if we count calories for one day we will lose ten pounds is just as unrealistic as expecting one session on differences in personal style to solve all people issues.

Step Two: Clarify and Share Values

"Values provide perspective in the best of times and the worst." - Charles Garfield

Reflect on your core values and list the top five that serve as a guide to your workplace behavior. Many programs on the market such as The [Get Real Guide](#) to Your Career by PeopleThink will be helpful in this process.

Understanding not just the core values of your organization, but the values of each team member is crucial in providing context as to why there are differences in behavior.

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Open discussions about team members' values will be worthwhile and thought provoking. The time spent discussing values will set an essential foundation toward building trust and cultivating positive interactions.

Step Three: Follow Your Gut

I recently took my college-aged daughter to a self-defense class for women. Prepared to start right in and learn my self-defense moves, I was surprised with Rule Number 1, TRUST YOUR GUT! If your intuition and senses are telling you something is wrong, listen and get out!

The same applies to our world at work. If you sense something is wrong, listen to your instincts! Stop and analyze the situation. Is it a difference in personal style or values? Or is there disrespect or bullying behavior in the office?

Doctors Gary and Ruth Namie, authors of the *Bully at Work*, define bullying as "repeated, health-harming mistreatment of a person by one or more workers that takes the form of verbal abuse; conduct or behaviors that are threatening, intimidating, or humiliating; sabotage that prevents work from getting done; or some combination of the three." According to the *Workplace Bullying Institute (BWI) and Zogby International*, 37% of American workers have been bullied at work and that bullying is four times more prevalent than illegal, discriminatory harassment. The survey was done in 2007 when 146 million Americans were employed, meaning an estimated 54 million Americans have been bullied at work.

If you are a target of bullying behavior, Namie and Namie suggest three clear steps: admit the behavior is happening, take time out to care for yourself, and expose the bullying behavior.

As a leader in your organization, you need to pay attention! According to Namie and Namie, targets "are blessed/cursed with a strong work ethic. They just want to be 'left alone' to do their work." The WBI-Zogby Survey found that 77% of bullied individuals left the jobs they once loved in order to put a stop to the bullying. Translation, you could be in danger of losing some of your most valued employees.

As a leader, it is imperative that you take a good hard look in the mirror. Could your intentions be viewed by others as controlling and manipulative? Is your ego getting in the way of seeing the difference between intentions and impact? Your intentions may be good and you may be the most passionate person around, but if your intent and passion are causing an impact that is controlling and manipulative, you could be the problem and could be on the verge of losing significant human resources.

"Knowing how to get along with people" as Theodore Roosevelt states, is the most important thing you can do to be successful. By understanding yourself and the personal style of others, and by putting a stop to bullying behavior, you will create a workplace environment that is enjoyable, fun and exhilarating. You will be on the road to success, a road that solves problems instead of creating them!

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