

# Wellness Center

AT THE WAC

## RELATIONSHIPS Can Be Tricky

Ever been in the situation where you have two close friends – both terrific and all-around great people – but they don't like each other? Or how about in the workplace when two or more people, sometimes even whole departments, don't get along?

The disputes and antics that result from this kind of discourse in the workplace can disrupt the entire organization in both subtle and significant ways. Loss of productivity, lack of innovation and human resource costs in the form of higher health insurance claims, sick days taken and turnover rates are all due to poor employee morale and the stress it causes.

So, how does an owner/manager turn their organization around and maximize its true potential? Here's an idea: Read the following article and consider attending a powerful presentation, "The Personal Path to Authentic Leadership." This presentation is co-sponsored by the WAC and *Washington CEO Magazine*, see page xx for details. And remember, great organizations have great leaders!



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# The COSTS of DRAMA in the workplace

BY DANNA BEAL / MEd

*What is the spirit of your workplace?*

*How would you rate the mental health of your organization?*

Unfortunately, many workplaces today are filled with emotional drama, power struggles, ego conflicts, gossip and fear. Employers are not getting the full value of their investment in employees when the workplace environment is filled with so much

dissension. According to The Conference Board, a group that creates and disseminates knowledge about management and the marketplace, only half of all Americans today say they are satisfied with their jobs. That number is down from nearly 60% in 1995. And among the 50% who say they are content, only 14% say they are "very satisfied."

The web of egos battling and competing for validation is wasting energy and time. Some of the problems resulting from this discord in the workplace are higher absenteeism, work-related accidents, lack of teamwork, poor customer service, inability

to retain employees, and lack of motivation and loyalty.

As the unemployment rate goes down, finding good employees becomes even more difficult. According to many experts, the cost of replacing any one position can be 30%-200% of the individual's annual salary. The financial costs to the companies

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with these dynamics are enormous, and often go unrecognized.

Emotional turbulence and unrest in the workplace is taking a toll on individuals as well. The high demand and increasingly heavy workloads have added to the problem. A study by the Families and Work Institute reported that employees who feel overworked are more likely to lose sleep, have physical and emotional health problems, make mistakes at work, be angry with employers, resent co-workers and look for different jobs.

Leaders have the greatest influence and ability to improve the workplace environment because leaders set the tone and direction for their organization. The attitude from the top cascades down throughout all levels of the organization and ultimately reaches the customer. Leaders from

successful companies recognize that treating employees with respect and creating environments of trust are the keys to high performance and success.

Unfortunately, according to a Gallup poll, many executives are burned out and only 49% of top executives are engaged in their work. Ask yourself the following questions that measure engagement in the workplace:

- ◆ The mission/purpose makes me feel my job is important.
- ◆ At work, my opinions count.
- ◆ This last year, I have had opportunities at work to learn and grow.
- ◆ I have a best friend at work.
- ◆ In the last six months, someone at work has talked to me about my progress.
- ◆ There is someone at work who encourages my development.
- ◆ In the last seven days, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work. (Source: Gallup Organization)

How can we create our own inner peace, personal satisfaction and positive morale in the workplace? The good news is that learning to deal with difficult relationships is actually a path for discovering faith in our self and our own authentic power. Looking within, instead of complaining and worrying about the situation, can open the door to a new sense of strength.

The following steps can help one become more confident, relaxed and effective amidst the reactionary web of egos that can be present in the workplace.

### 1. Do not hold others responsible for your feelings, actions and circumstances.

In others words, don't immediately point the finger of blame when something upsets you. Take a moment to look within and ask, "What is the threat here?" Instead of attacking the perceived source of your pain or irritation, stop and recognize that only you can create your feelings. As you identify your fear, you will be more able to let it go and give up the grip of your own ego. This will help give you the inner confidence to communicate with the person(s) you are having a conflict with and discover your common ground. When you speak with honesty, and not blame, you open the door to rebuilding the relationship. Trying to win or be right is one of the ego's main strategies. But that tactic builds barriers to

communication and intensifies the conflict and drama.

### 2. Do not compare yourself to others.

If you compare yourself to others you will begin to feel either inadequate or superior. You can easily start to believe that "who you are" is related to your "status" in the workplace. You have unique gifts to offer and the more you focus on your own inner path and achieving your personal goals, the more confident and authentic you will become. Comparing yourself to others can incite inner feelings of envy or arrogance, both of which add to workplace dissension.

### 3. Do not seek personal glory and approval from others.

Relying on external validation will limit your own personal growth and set you up to lose confidence if you don't have approval from others. The greatest leaders throughout time were willing to "take a stand" for a principle and didn't rely on the approval of others. It feels good to be appreciated but the more you can let go of the need for approval or, conversely, the fear of criticism, the more authentically powerful you will become.

### 4. Do not deny your feelings and emotions.

Too often we believe it is a weakness to have and express emotions. However, emotions are a message for our inner self to get our attention. We need to pay attention to what we are feeling and be willing to own them and express our feelings in healthy ways. If we deny our feelings and try to suppress them, we can become sick or they may come out in unhealthy ways.

### 5. Transcend the drama by finding humor in the ongoing performance.

Learn to lighten up and not take yourself or the dynamics in the workplace so seriously. Humor can play an important role in the office or company. Humor is actually good for business because it raises morale, increases creativity and improves productivity. Another survey by Robert Half International found that out of 1,000 executives, 84% felt that workers with a sense of humor did a better job. Southwest Airline's progressive CEO Herb Kelleher says, "If work was more FUN, it would feel less like work." So it appears laughter is not only healthy, it is good for business. ●



**Danna Beal, MEd**, is a recent keynote speaker for the Washington CEO "Best Companies to Work For" annual dinner, international speaker and author of *Tragedy in the Workplace: The Longest Running Show in the Country*.