

MAKE A POSITIVE IMPACT AT WORK!

By Leonard Szymczak, MSW, LCSW

More than half of your life is spent earning a living. If your job is fulfilling and you are surrounded by a wonderful group of people, your life can be very rewarding. If, however, your workplace is riddled with tension, the pressure can follow you home.

The greatest source of stress in the workplace often results from poor interpersonal relationships and conflict. Lack of trust at work can increase feelings of frustration and discouragement and can lead to endless hours of wasted time spent by workers discussing relationships that are stressing them out.

Such misunderstandings or conflicts on the job affect morale, productivity, absenteeism, and job satisfaction. Anyone who has experienced an environment where bickering, gossiping, and sniping is more the rule than the exception knows the damaging impact it can have on everyone.

People obviously function more efficiently at work when they feel fulfilled and productive, and have supportive relationships. A work environment that encourages respect, cooperation, trust, teamwork, rewards, and common goals goes a long way toward promoting a positive climate.

You don't have to be in charge of your department to make a difference. By altering your attitude and behavior, you can make a positive impact at work. Here's how.

- **EMPOWER YOURSELF.** In his book, *Getting Things Done When You Are Not in Charge*, Geoffrey Bellman states that you have inner power to decide what to do and how to do it. You may not be in charge but you can have a clear vision of the kind of employee you want to be. Ask yourself these questions. "What power do you have now? How could you use that power more effectively to make changes at work that would positively affect others?"
- **BUILD BRIDGES.** Listening is an important tool that requires effort and attention. Mark Twain once said, "If we were meant to talk more than listen, we would have been born with two mouths and only one ear." Listening to the other side does wonders to build bridges.
- **INCREASE RAPPORT.** One of the most effective methods when dealing with people is to strengthen rapport. When you feel connected, you respond far better to others. Increase rapport by putting yourself in the other person's shoes. Recognize and understand your differences. Highlighting the accomplishments and skills of your colleagues not only strengthens relationships but also provides a solid base to handle conflicts when they arise. Positive comments and true appreciation create a climate of encouragement and support at work.

- **COMMUNICATE WITH INTENTION.** If you're not getting your message across with a colleague, consider changing the way you're communicating. A good communicator knows how to convey thoughts and ideas and get positive responses. This means articulating your position, reading the feedback, and altering the way you're conveying the message so that it can be heard.
- **ESTABLISH WINNING RELATIONSHIPS.** Interpersonal support binds people together and the lack of trust breaks people apart. Relationships grow in settings where people are committed to common concerns and value one another. A positive support system at work provides emotional encouragement for people during difficult times and offers a sounding board to float new ideas. Actively promoting these winning relationships goes a long way toward reducing stress at work.
- **ENCOURAGE TEAMWORK.** Stephen Covey in *The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People* stressed the importance of synergy, which means that the whole is greater than the sum of its parts. A group that has high levels of trust and cooperation is better at working together in completing projects and working toward the common goal. And as Billy Martin, former manager of the New York Yankees said, "There's nothing greater in the world than when somebody on the team does something good, and everybody gather around to pat him on the back."
- **DON'T LET CONFLICTS BREW.** Differences resolved early lead to better understanding. Conflicts left unresolved lead to divisiveness. Tactfully discuss differences and move toward agreements. When you establish rapport, you are in a better position to resolve problems. Obviously it's better to handle conflict first with the individual that's causing a problem. If that doesn't work, consider communicating your needs in a different way. If there's still no positive response, take the matter to the next level and involve your supervisor or manager. Difficult problems may need mediation. Conflict resolved positively with a win/win position will lead to increased understanding and trust.
- **CONSIDER HUMOR.** If you had a choice of working with one of two colleagues who were similar in work habits except one had a sense of humor, whom would you rather work with? John Cleese, of Monty Python fame, was asked if he thought there were times when humor might not help. He replied, "Yes, if you're attacking a machine gun emplacement . . . but when the job is done, you had better find something to laugh about, or spend some time relaxing and having fun." It goes without saying that humor at work is best handled by poking fun at yourself rather than making someone else the butt of a joke.

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