



Management and Performance Associates – Newsletter - May 2007

People, sometimes, make it difficult

Nothing gives one person so much advantage over another as to remain always cool and unruffled under all circumstances.

Thomas Jefferson (1743 - 1826)

Facilitating meetings or group dynamics is always a rewarding activity, since the exchange of ideas and experiences among people benefits all. Sometimes, though, things do not go as planned.

Not long ago we facilitated a class which focused on the communication process. Only 10% of the audience had arrived at 9 am. When we started, a participant requested that the lighting be dimmed. Everybody else attacked him, unnecessarily, using tasteless qualifiers, disguised as “jokes.” Throughout the day it was hard to move ahead due to the amount of interruptions and out of place comments. It was a challenge to overcome their resistance to considering the different points of view being presented. The large majority was heralded behind a typical “this does not work here” attitude. As we still had a day and a half ahead of us, we decided to intervene. These things, unfortunately, do happen...With some skills and lots of persistence and serenity we can learn how to deal with “difficult and abusive people.” Let’s see how:

1. Don’t be a victim of the situation. Doing nothing only deteriorates things. People expect you to do something, anything, especially your employees. Doing nothing will immediately generate a lack of respect toward you. And you will not be respecting those who are genuinely interested, the ones who are involved and actively participating. Act. Think.

2. What is difficult and abusive is the behavior, not the person.

Differentiate between the “person” and “behavior.” Not personalizing will avoid labeling which does not help at all. When we refer to someone using qualifiers we are increasing our negative emotions or aggressiveness and then we lose control.

3. The million dollar question: Am I the only one being bothered, or is there an impact on the task?

If the answer is “only me,” let it go. If there is an impact on the task or results to achieve, then, it is time to act, before it is too late.

4. The most difficult question: Am I contributing to this behavior?

It is always a good idea to review our own behaviors. Am I listening to everybody? Is my style dynamic and serene? Am I talking too much? A timely self awareness exercise will avoid future problems.

5. Control your verbal and non-verbal language.

Guess what happens if your words indicate one idea but your body language the opposite? People will focus on your body language, not your words.

6. Help others increase their awareness of their behaviors and the negative impact.

In other words, provide feedback that emphasizes the negative impacts of the behavior being observed, without manipulating or exaggerating. Then ask: Why is that happening? What are the causes?

7. Refocus on the benefits of teamwork.

Sometimes people are not aware of their behaviors. We can help them to understand that certain rules of civility will bring benefits to everybody. No drama, you are not in an opera. Do it well, concisely, offering



examples. Then, move ahead with your work.

8. Do not approach the problem from your power position. The fact that you are the boss does not bring any solutions to the table. Look for the roots of the problem in order to do a solid diagnostic. Then work on an agreement, focusing on collaboration.

Finally, remember: nobody wakes up in the morning with an evil plan to ruin your day. Look for the causes and leave your labels at home. See you next month!

See you next time. We welcome your feedback.

To know more of our training programs, please send us an e-mail to:

sergio.pereira@mapa-way.com or

sonia.dondice@mapa-way.com

Visit our website:

www.mapa-way.com