Management and Performance Associates - September 2009
Which excuse will save me today?

"He who wants to do something will find a way to do it, and he who doesn't, will find excuses for not doing it."
Arab proverb

It was one of those typical situations at the end of a project, when everything seemed to be boiling over. The following true dialogue between Peter and his boss took place a few days ago:
- Boss: "Did you call Mary and let her know that we need the information right now?"
- Peter:" I called her several times, but all I got was her voicemail..."
- Boss: "Did you leave a message?"
- Peter: "No"
- Boss: "Why not?"
- Peter: "Because when she listens to the message later tonight it will be too late"
- Boss:"And how do you know she will only listen to the message tonight?"
- Peter (justifying): "Well...I think she only listens to her messages when she gets home, later in the evening..."

As mentioned, it was one of those *tense* moments. To protect the innocent, we'll stop the dialogue here….But, if we analyze its details, we'll see this dialogue suffers from two very frequent problems in the corporate world: **Assumptions and Self-Justification.**

According to the Merriam-Webster Dictionary, **"Assume"** means to take something for granted or true. Synonyms are "suppose" or "presume." In the current complex work environment, working on assumptions is highly risky and ineffective, since assumptions are beliefs not supported by certainty. We destroy the communication process when we speak or act based on assumptions, as the end product will not be a consequence of reality but from our imagination. As we interact with others, we may create false expectations, or worse, give them wrong information. As *they* continue interacting with others, and multiplying the misinformation received, you can see how serious this could be.

Is there anything we can do to avoid assuming? Of course!

- We can start by **acknowledging assumptions**, becoming aware that they are only a possibility, instead of concrete facts.
- It is critical to **communicate based on data and facts.** Otherwise, make it clear that you are "only assuming."
- Finally, **don't speak for others**, if you don't know their opinions.

Back to the dictionary: **"Self-Justification"** is the act of, or an instance of making excuses for oneself. Also, to defend our attitude, explain and/or offer reasons and pretext. That's the problem! Sometimes to survive a situation, we defend what's indefensible. This justifiably makes people around us crazy.

When we "assume," we involve others and ourselves in imagined possibilities. When we "justify ourselves" we close the door to self-development. When we offer an excuse, we *believe* that we defend ourselves from any questionable action, an action that we are responsible for. When we blame others, we run away from self-responsibility. By acting like this, nothing changes, and we avoid development and growth.

What can we do to avoid excuses and justifications?
- **Acknowledge** our excuses. Peter has lost an excellent opportunity to recognize his error with a simple "*I didn't think of it.*"

He preferred to blame Mary... supposing *she always gets home late*... Not only did he not solve the problem, but he annoyed his boss and kept Mary in the dark.

- **Only act after assessing the current context.** Much more practical than using past information, such as: "I can't leave a message for Mary because she *always* comes home late." Why not ask yourself: "What if Mary is picking up her messages remotely?", or "What if Mary is home, and screening her calls?"
- **Be accountable.** It requires being humble, accepting errors, asking for feedback and exploring other possibilities. In short, self-development.

"Finding excuses is easy. Getting results is hard."
Contemporary corporate proverb

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