

The Leadership STOP Sign!

By Neville Knowles

If you feel *COMPELLED* to react - *STOP!!!!*

A Manager fired off a scathing e-mail concerning a manager in another department, copying upstream management and co-workers alike. The issue at hand was surely contentious however in no way justified the means of dealing with it.

The *impact* of the e-mail was far reaching. It caused the receiving manager to feel confused, frustrated, and angry and like she had been thrown under the bus. As the note was copied between the departments it served to be divisive and polarizing interdepartmentally. Upstream leadership copied on the communications now had an interpersonal situation they needed to get involved with. Re-directing the behavior wouldn't be easy and would consume time that alternatively might have been deployed in achieving productive objectives.

While the sender of the e-mail got a sense of immediate satisfaction, it was falsely so for once he was asked to re-read the communication he recognized the error of his ways. Organizationally the *values* of the workplace, specifically *respect* and *teamwork*, were violated through the off handed communications.

E-mail can and has undone more working relationships than any other messaging approach. Copying others in the malaise can be even more disastrous!

As Black Elk wisely stated “*It is in the darkness of their eyes that men get lost.*”

In person communication is 55% physical (body language), 35% tonality and 10% is in the words. It's in our subconscious feelings, emotions, thoughts and nuances that we reflect our inner truth. *People re-act to how we feel towards them verses what we say to them.*

In an e-mail message, words are the only conveyor of meaning. In a phone conversation at least tonality and words are in play. In a personal meeting all three are in play and thus it represents a higher form of communication.

Why is it then when troubled by an issue of conflict we fire off an e-mail verses taking the time to meet in person with the individual to move beyond the issue at hand?

Might self deception be in play? Might we be holding ourselves correct and the other person wrong, objectifying them while inflating our correctness? What's the *cost* of *self deception*?

Self deception commonly leads to distorted views, self righteousness and the need to be right (or EGO). When one is in a *self deceptive state* they will be experienced as *dismissive, blaming, conflicted or resistant* to those around them.

Another attribute of self deception is that it tends to lead to collusion. Collusion occurs when someone in a state of self deception attempts to bring others to their way of seeing the matter and in doing so tries to self justify themselves and their perspective. In the example above many were copied. The cost of collusion in work cultures today can and is significant. *Collusion* undermines positivity and consequently productivity over time.

In leadership there's little room for self deception or collusion for they are divisive, polarizing and get in the way of the natural flow of achieving teams, councils and cultures. Most importantly achieving processes are maligned.

As Shakespeare wisely put it "*There is no good nor bad, it's our thinking that makes it so.*"

Holding interpersonal relationships big is the hallmark of an influential leader.

Influential leaders self manage their response orientations better. They choose to hold relationships as all important and recognize progress can only be achieved through foundations of strong relationship. They understand that breaches of *trust* and consequently *respect* in relationships serve to reduce effectiveness in leadership and the organization.

Influential leaders view self deception as an inherent opportunity. They recognize that in working to change the beliefs of the self deceiver, behavior will change and leadership will be strengthened. They are committed to growing their people and investing the time to do so. In creating greater awareness of the impact and costs of self-deception, beliefs for change emerge and behaviour naturally re-aligns with coaching.

Managing feelings of compelled reactivity is not easy. Consider the following steps to avoid it:

- 1) First acknowledge your own feelings of anxiety, frustration and disappointment.
- 2) Take a DEEP breath or two or three!
- 3) Contextualize the importance of the conflict and recognize whose conflict it is.
- 4) Rationally examine the facts and what need occur.
- 5) Determine how best to manage the matter from a relationship first perspective (verses results first).

- 6) Act only at such time that *all* anxiety, frustration and disappointment on the matter or towards the other person is gone, usually the next day is most appropriate.

Indeed, e-mail is a highly useful communications tool when used respectfully and when differences of perspective aren't in play. In cases of divergent perspectives a personal meeting or phone conversation best serve the working relationship and process.

So the next time you're faced with feelings of anxiety, frustration and/or anger...STOP... step back, *don't react* and follow the self management suggestions above. Your leadership and relationship network is worthy of it!