

The Void

One of the reasons abuse — verbal abuse in the form of harsh, negative and demeaning judgments and criticisms, gossiping, bullying and other types of verbal assaults — is common in the workplace is people's lack of conversation skills, the type of skills that support one to speak to another openly, honestly and respectfully, about what really matters. Folks who are comfortable in their own skin who are able to listen and understand consciously, who possess effective communication skills, and who are able to speak up and speak out, who can discuss difficult topics with a sense of ease and grace are healthier than those who can't.

In the workplace, folks who say they have healthy relationships with bosses, direct reports, co-workers and other stakeholders experience less stress, burnout, rustout and physical, emotional and mental ailments.

The reason those with good dialogue skills have fewer ailments is because they are able to work through issues, conflict and differences in a healthy way a way that doesn't resort to attacking, belittling, one-upping, demeaning, dismissing, labeling, insulting, ridiculing, or verbally harming another.

It behooves the conscious organization, team, department, unit or group to explore how it engenders and supports the power of dialogue. A conscious exploration of the power of dialogue urges leaders, managers, supervisors and team leaders, for example, to openly examine how folks interact with one another. For example, are employees allowed, even encouraged, to speak their minds? Are folks asked and encouraged to share information so that it sees the light of day by everyone (as appropriate)? Are all stakeholders asked for their input on important decisions? Do leaders, managers, supervisors and team leaders ask their direct reports, What do you think? early and often? In essence, does your organization, department or team empower folks to contribute and engage in healthy conversation and dialogue? Does your organization and team train for, and consciously value and support, open and honest dialogue?

Where there is no opportunity to speak up, speak out, ask questions, contribute, and engage, there is a void. Where folks lack the skills to dialogue effectively, there is a void. And, employees, like nature, abhor a vacuum. If a conversational void exists, if your organization or team inhibits open and honest communication, or does not support the empowering of your employees to be effective communicators, your employees will most assuredly find a way to fill it. Unfortunately, the method many employees use to fill the void are more often than not self-destructive and self-sabotaging to the organization or the team rumors, gossip, complaining, nit-picking, blaming, bitching, moaning, finger-pointing, and out and out lying.

So, there it is. The center that holds, the fulcrum on which your organization or teams positive energy and vitality rests is effective communication and dialogue. When your employees engage, with their hearts and minds, openly and honestly, shared meaning is the result. Healthy communication begets a healthy relationship and healthy relationships beget a healthy team and a healthy organization.

So, some questions for self-reflection are:

- Do you trust others' opinions?

- Do you hear as well as listen?
- Do you ask others, What do you think? on a regular basis?
- Do you make it safe for others to speak?
- Do you find yourself needing to resort to one or more of the following roadblocks to effective communication when people are speaking to you: advising, one-upping, educating, telling your story, shutting down the other, interrogating the other, fixing the other, correcting the other? If so, why?
- Do you find it difficult to be present to another?
- How do you feel when you think you're not being heard?
- Do your colleagues and friends say you are a good listener? Have you ever asked them?
- Does your labeling or judgment of others kill dialogue?
- Do you allow ideas to stand on their own merit regardless of who is offering the ideas?
- Do you scrutinize the messenger as well as the message? If so, why?
- Is your conversation style punctuated more by periods or by question marks? Why?
- Do you allow time for dialogue in your workday?

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