

Practical Strategies Online!

Fall 2005

The email and web newsletter
on organization and management issues for business

From Michael H. Smith, Ph.D., and Associates

In This Issue:

- Dept. of Forgiveness: The Key to Conflict Resolution
- Dept. of Organization Improvement: Making Mistakes
- Dept. of Presentations

Forgiveness: The Key to Conflict Resolution

Problem: In every organization, many small tensions and conflicts build up between people who have worked with each other over time. For example:
The manager and employee who frequently fight about the quality of the employee's work because the manager doesn't give him adequate feedback
The abrasive employer who argues with his coworkers because he too often tells them what to do

The employee and outside supplier who constantly bicker with each other over last minute orders

All of these examples can build up to the point where they can have a profoundly negative effect on productivity, quality and employees' morale.

Solution: The traditional model of conflict resolution used by most consultants simply focuses on clarifying the various needs of the parties involved and trying to come to a mutually agreeable solution. But because this approach doesn't deal directly with the underlying emotional issues that caused the problem in the first place, things just tend to blow up all over again.

In my experience, I've discovered that what's missing in the area of conflict resolution is the experience of forgiveness. Forgiveness involves the willingness to let go of an obsessive focus on the past and release the old hurts and resentments that have built up over time.

It is important to understand that forgiving someone doesn't mean condoning or justifying what he or she has done to you. It simply means letting go of the desire to seek vengeance on him or her. As Martin Luther King has said, forgiveness requires you to look for the good in the person despite what he has done to you.

By learning how to stop blaming each other and take responsibility for our feelings of victimization, we can begin to perceive our self and others as innocent. Forgiveness enables us to come into the present and create a fresh start with the other person. Once two people have forgiven each other, then a new agreement can be worked out to settle differences, an agreement that is more likely to last over time.

Here is a simple forgiveness exercise that I've developed for my clients:

Take a few deep breaths into the center of your chest and visualize the person you're upset with.

Now say to yourself, "I'm willing to forgive you for whatever you've done to me. I'm willing to release all anger, pain, resentment and blame related to you. All is complete between us."

Example: A newly provisionally appointed government official was challenged by a staff member with 20 years of experience. She questioned the appointee's qualifications and refused to work with him in a supportive manner.

Results: I was brought in to help resolve this conflict. I worked with the staff member to facilitate her letting go of her negative judgments about the appointee and to forgive what she perceived were his past mistakes. He also forgave her for strongly opposing him. Once they forgave each other, they were then able to agree upon certain guidelines as to how they would work together in a more harmonious manner, e.g., he would ask her input before making certain decisions.

The opposition to the official becoming permanent ended. The government was able to save the \$100,000 that it was going to spend on a special election to choose someone else for the position he had filled.

Summary: The bottom line is: Forgiveness makes good business sense. By letting go of the old hurts and resentments from the past, you will be able to get more work done with fewer conflicts.

For more an indepth treatment on forgiveness, send me an email requesting my article "Teaching Forgiveness in the Workplace."

Dept. of Organization Improvement: Making Mistakes

Most of us who have been in the work world awhile know that we've learned the most significant lessons from our mistakes. Organizations, however, have varied responses to mistakes which range from "What did you Learn from that?" to "You're fired."

Brogan & Partners, a marketing and advertising agency in Detroit, has taken mistakes a step further probably than anyone else. It has the "Mistake of the Month" award which honors employees who confess their blunders to the staff. The 60 - person staff votes on the best mistake and the winner gets \$50. The idea behind it is that in sharing a mistake, everyone learns from it. The same mistake could be happening elsewhere in the company and that could prove costly. Senior leadership had to start the process at their monthly meetings. Now, employees at all levels join in.

A mistake: Last fall, a staff member spent the weekend finishing a report to be presented to a client on Monday. He was printing out hundreds of pages when the color printer died. There was no technician available on the weekends. He had to rush to Kinko's to get his materials printed, a job that cost Brogan two thousand dollars.

The learning: Brogan now brings a technician to check the printer before big projects are due. It also now has an emergency repair person on call.

As reported in **Inc. Magazine**, Feb. 2005.

Dept. of Presentations

Dr. Smith will be speaking on:

Negotiating Difficult Workplace Conversations. Northern California Human Resources Assoc., Nov. 17, Berkeley, CA. Contact NCHRA (415) 291-1992

Michael H. Smith, Ph.D
Michael H. Smith, Ph.D. and Associates
Conflict Management and Productivity Specialists
5801 Leona St., Ste A
Oakland, CA 94605
510-530-7900
Fax: 510-530-7922
email:mhsmith@michaelhsmithphd.com

Visit our World Wide Web site at:
www.michaelhsmithphd.com

Bringing Peace to the Workplace Since 1986

Member of:

- Northern California Human Resources Assoc.
- Tri-Valley Human Resources Assoc.
- American Society for Training and Development
- Institute of Management Consultants