Overcome Negativity In the Workplace

Years ago, Bing Crosby sang, “Accentuate the Positive, Eliminate the Negative, and Don’t Mess With Mr. In Between.” Not bad advice. The trouble is, a good portion of our society and many of our work places do just the opposite.

That’s certainly true of the news industry. It would be more accurate to call it the “bad news business,” or as one person said, CNN stands for “constant negative news.” In the bizarre world of broadcasting, a killing is always covered while acts of kindness are always almost ignored.

This negative emphasis is all too evident in our workforce – young and old. I’ve spent a lot of time on university campuses, and I don’t see a lot of enthusiastic students there. In fact, student health clinics report that help with clinical depression is one of the most frequent services they offer. In a national survey of 16 to 29 year olds, MTV reported that “angry” and “stressed out” were the best descriptions of that generation.

When I’m working inside an organization, I notice a similar negativity among many workers. I go into the hallways, lunchroom, or work area, and I see a whining-gripping-complaining syndrome. The light has gone out in people’s eyes. People come to work with a sense of routinism and obligation rather than passion.

This has got to stop. I can think of few things worse than spending 30 to 40 years in a negative work environment. Besides robbing you of your health and happiness, it’s almost impossible to produce the highest quality goods or provide exceptional customer service in such an environment.

If You’re The One

So what can you do? Start by taking a good, honest, and perhaps uncomfortable look at your actions. Are you making your work environment more positive or negative? No one is a neutral. You’re doing something to make your organization a richer or poorer place to work.

Second, look at your words. Can you go for 24 hours without saying anything negative? When I ask my audiences that question, a few raise their hands signifying “yes,” but the vast majority shout “no.” I respond by saying “those who can’t answer “yes” have a serious problem. If you can’t go 24 hours without drinking alcohol, you’re addicted to alcohol. If you can’t go 24 hours without smoking, you’re addicted to nicotine. And if you can’t go 24 hours without saying something unkind, you’re addicted to negativity.

If these tests lead you to thinking you’re too negative, then the third thing you need to do is realize the price you’re paying for staying negative. In a study done at Duke
University Medical Center, it was discovered that people with high levels of cynical, complaining behaviors were 50% more likely to have clogged arteries than those who were less negative. In another one of their studies, people with high cynicism scores had five times more heart disease than those who scored below the median. Quite simply, complainers do not live as long as positive people.

To become a more positive person at work, quit keeping track of the negatives. Did you ever notice that on a bad day, some people tend to count every irritation or inconvenience that occurs? They’ll burst out with “This is the third time today something like this has happened.” Yet seldom on a good day do these people say “This is the third time today something great has happened.” Keeping track of the negative reinforces a negative personality.

Consider the benefits of talking about good things instead. You might discover more positive incidents occur than negative. You could find yourself actively looking for incidents to celebrate rather than complain about. And keeping yourself in a positive frame of mind means you get more enjoyment from your work and personal life.

**If It’s The Other Guy**

Now you might be saying “That’s all well and good. But I’m fairly positive. What bothers me are all the negative people I have to work with. What do I do in that situation?” I conduct an entire workshop on that question, but let me give you three strategies to get started.

First, passively or actively question the negative remarks of others. You’ve heard the expression “It’s too good to be true.” You’ve learned that that’s often the case. Likewise, when you hear someone go on and on about how bad things are or how bad it’s going to be, simply say “It’s too bad to be true.” More often than not you’ll be right.

Second, don’t take advice from constantly negative people. When you hear people say things like marriage doesn’t work, that change will never succeed, that no one cares, take a look at who’s talking. Are they winners or losers? Obviously, they’re losers. So be careful of taking their comments too much to heart. In my workshop, I ask people to raise their right hands and repeat after me, “I hereby commit that from now on I will not take advise from anyone more messed up than I am.” People laugh, but they get the point.

Finally, use an imaginary glass screen. The moment you sense negativity coming from others, imagine a glass screen coming around you. Tell yourself the glass screen rebuffs
all the negative, allowing only the positive to flow through. You will find that you can continue to converse and stay involved with those around you, but you won’t be affected by their negativity. I know, it sounds silly, but it works!

**Conclusion**

A couple of years ago in the movie *Forrest Gump*, Forrest’s mother said, “Life is like a box of chocolates.” Sure, you could get a nougat, a chocolate covered nut, or a cherry cordial, but the most important thing about a box of chocolates is that everything it contains is sweet. High achievers always take that approach.

There is nothing more important than having that same kind of spirit in the work place. I can teach you how to do that. Call me and we can book a program for your next meeting.