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PERSON TO PERSON

By P.J (Phil) Kolbuc

The success or failure of an organization (Business, Industry, non-profit, First Nations or Government) depends almost entirely on the quality of interaction between and amongst individuals within that organization. What is 'quality interaction' and why does it seem to be so hard to achieve and more importantly what can we do about it?

I certainly don't profess to have all the answers but based on my 30+ year as a Human Resource Professional I have heard thousands of people say that in their workplace there is a lack of honesty, trust, integrity, open communication, open-mindedness, willingness to listen, understanding and appreciation of others. I hear statements such as, "they never listen", "I am not going to let them know what I think (let alone feel)", "You can't trust them", "They are just trying to get more for less", "If they would only ask", "they never walk the talk", etc.

This certainly seems to be supported by research that suggests everything is not fine and well in the work-place. One such study done by Harris Interactive (Harris Poll) based on a survey; 2.5 million people indicated that only 3 in 5 workers felt that they could express themselves openly at work. Forty-two percent (42%) did not agree with the statement "I feel safe in expressing my opinions without fear of retribution" and; a similar number of employees indicated that their employers / boss (s) did not consistently honour commitments and they didn't trust them. It's not surprising then that 85% said that they do not function in a safe, win-win work environment. This is not just about making people feel good. There is a high cost to low trust. Litigation is only one glaring example, when an Employee feels they have been harassed or wrongfully dismissed, not to mention low productivity, low morale and motivation. Why is it that most people don't wake up in the morning and say, "I can't wait to get to work?" On any given day, in this great country of Canada, over 250,000 people don't show up for work and based on the previous studies quoted that would suggest that over 50% of these absences are a direct result of "I do not function in a safe, win-win workplace". Just imagine if every organization could reduce that number by 1% over 12 months, this would translate into over 5,000,000 person hours of additional / improved work.....a simple 1%.....sounds easy!

The answer is simple. We need to communicate with each other in an open, honest manner without fear of retribution and we need to create a work climate based on trust and integrity, where individuals feel that they can make a significant contribution to meeting the goals of the organization and people listen. So, how does one (an organization) make that happen? Education doesn't seem to be enough. What people need is education and training, and training implies time and practise. The average person / worker spend at least 80% of their day communicating with others and of this time, 80% of that time is spent 'listening'. Now most everyone has spent a great deal of time acquiring ones 'education', learning how to read, write, do arithmetic and speaking.....and now we spend most of our time listening but have not spent one hour learning how to listen, let alone practice listening. We need to learn to 'listen louder'. Listening builds trust. It demonstrates interest and caring....it encourages others to be more open and honest.

But of course we might learn how to listen but we may all hear differently. In one of my seminars I tell everyone a short story about two Uncles of mine and then ask them to respond to three questions, sometimes I get as many answers as there are people in the room, and then I try to get them to agree on one answer. Very quickly you see how well people listen and don't listen, and how personalities and perceptions effect communication.

On the other side of the equation sometimes we don't want to listen we want to be heard. How do we go about telling others what we think or how we feel without making things worse? Again, we have spent a lot of time learning how to talk but little or no time on how to really express ourselves. This becomes particularly difficult when someone is doing something and you would like them to do something else. Just think of all the situations at work and personally where others do things that you dislike, or disagree with and think of the times we may have brought this to the other persons attention, or have not mentioned anything.

Over the past 30 years of doing third party conflict resolution, I can't recall the countless times I have asked....."so, have you brought this to this persons attention, have you said to them what you just said to me now?" Most often the answer is NO! "I just don't want to make it worse or 'yes' and its made the situation worse. So again the question becomes, how do I let others know how I am feeling or what I am thinking in a manner that keeps the lines of communication open and shows respect.....so that a satisfactory and mutually beneficial outcome can be achieved? Another education and training issue? We know the value of giving and receiving feedback, but how we do it is another question?

I am sure I haven't said anything that you don't already know. So what's the next step? To find out more about how K & A can help you and your organizations take the next step and visit www.humanresources.com or www.philkolbuc.ca

