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Frozen by Tension in the Office

A MATTER OF THE HEART AND THE HEAD

IN THE DISNEY blockbuster “Frozen,” wounds to Anna’s head and heart set up the conflict for the story. In the office, frozen hearts and minds set up the conflicts that wound people and erode productivity. In both worlds, warm hearts, limber minds, and a bit of persistence combine to make a powerful antidote.

I like my job, but the people...

Most people like their jobs; it is the “people” who make work difficult. In fact, 50-60 percent of voluntary turnover is attributed to interpersonal conflict, and 90 percent of terminations are traceable to unresolved conflict. That’s just part of the picture though. When people are in conflict, communication suffers, problems go unsolved, and work stalls. People spend time ruminating and gossiping over issues rather than working. And that is just when people show up! Anxiety over office “drama” is a leading contributor to lateness and absenteeism.

FROZEN HEARTS AND HEADS

Let’s be honest with ourselves. We play a huge part in the conflicts we experience. Like Princess Elsa, whose fearful, prideful heart and rigid thinking nearly destroyed the kingdom, our hearts and minds lead us into needless battles.

Conflict is caused by the perception that someone has devalued us or attacked our self-worth. Those attacks, however, usually have more to do with our point-of-view than objective reality. Though we don’t know the full story, we cling to our perspective like it is THE TRUTH. But, human perceptions are notoriously unreliable.

A FUNDAMENTAL FLAW

People need to know “why,” and we have a bias for believing that people do things “because it’s in their nature to do them.” When a colleague passes by without a greeting, we’re convinced it’s because she is hateful rather than distracted. Psychologists call this The “Fundamental Attribution Error,” and that’s often what it is – an error.

If my colleague is distracted, then I brush it off. If she is hateful toward me, then I get defensive because my self-image is tied to being a lovable person. When people feel threatened, their heart and heads depart for a very cold journey.

In our heads, we say things like:

- I know why you did that.
- It was intentional.
- You are all to blame.

In our hearts, we nurture self-centered thoughts:

- My way is the right way.
- You don’t deserve forgiveness.
- I’ll show you.

In reality, these beliefs and attitudes are just stories that appeal to our insecurities. Though it is not what anyone wants, fear, pride, and fuzzy thinking keep us frozen in this miserable cycle of conflict.

THE ANTIDOTE

In the movie, Anna’s loving heart, clear thinking, and tireless pursuit of reconciliation overcomes a new ice age. The same formula applies in the office. Here are some habits to cultivate in yourself that will help keep your heart toasty, your mind nimble, and your office icicle free.

- Have an appreciative heart: express appreciation to someone in the office every day.

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STEP 3

Don't hire "mini-me's". It's the diversity of thoughts, ideas and perspectives that are the key to a vibrant and flexible organization.

STEP 4

Take the time to find out what they're looking for in a corporate culture, and what will get them excited about the position. If you know exactly what the candidate is looking for, you can assess if your company and the job you're offering meet those desires. Even if your position is not an exact match, you will be able to have a candid conversation about what does and doesn't fit.

STEP 5

Get started early with Pre-Boarding. You can get an early start in transitioning your awesome new hire into your company by allowing them to have access to the paperwork they'll need to fill out the day that they accept their new position. You should also be sure that they get as much company information regarding policies, procedures, and benefits.

STEP 6

Announce the new hire's arrival. Introducing the new hire to the company, both globally and on a one-on-one in-person basis, will emphasize the company's commitment to the individual and facilitate the new hire's engagement with other employees.

If you are able to effectively recruit and hire motivated and actively engaged candidates into your organization, you will have a much easier time keeping them engaged and motivated. Good Luck! ■

- Dwell on and talk about your colleagues' strengths.
- Don't blame others; instead admit how you contributed to problems.
- Address offenses directly and as soon as you can while maintaining emotional control.
- Assume that you don't have all the facts and don't have "complete perspective." Ask the other person for their facts and perspective.
- Doggedly pursue healthy relationships like your job depends on it – because it just might.

These habits are good for any situation, whether your office relationships are frigid or toasty. Give them a try and watch relationships in your office warm-up.

Though most office conflicts can be addressed personally, sometimes team dynamics make them too difficult to handle alone. Sometimes outside help is needed. Given the cost of conflict and the rewards of a healthy environment, don't hesitate to ask for help when you feel overwhelmed by your situation. ■

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CALLING ALL MEMBERS

Participate in our 2015 Member Incentives and Receive a One-Year Membership Renewal or a Gift Card

Do you have colleagues who would benefit from Maryland MGMA's educational programs and benefits? Please encourage them to join as a member. Growing our membership base will expand our network and allow us to enhance the benefits for all members.

Any Maryland MGMA member who recruits three brand new members between now and August 31, 2015 will receive a free one-year membership renewal for 2016. The new applicant must include your name in the referral section of the online membership application.

We will also be doing a quarterly drawing for a \$100 gift card for those who recruited just ONE member that quarter. Winners will be announced in MediNews.

Direct your referrals to the Membership tab at www.marylandmgma.com. Membership questions may be directed to Jennifer Thornton or Sam Devine at the Maryland MGMA office – 410.752.3318.

NEW MEMBER CORNER

Please join us in welcoming the following new Maryland MGMA members who joined between November 21, 2014 and January 15, 2015:

- Michelle Garonzik**
Baltimore Neurosurgery and Spine Center
- Penny Lee Pollock**
Orthopedic Solutions, LLP, A Division of The Centers for Advanced Orthopedics
- Margaret Hunt**
Horizon Surgical Group
- Teresa Baran**
Calvert Memorial Hospital
- Donne Charette**
Calvert Memorial Hospital
- Laurie J. Copsey**
Calvert Memorial Hospital
- Terri DePhillip-Patterson**
Calvert Physician Associates, LLC
- Elizabeth K McWey**
Calvert Memorial Hospital
- Holly Ann Miller**
Maryland Vascular Specialists