

*To tell the TRUTH: Dealing with
Negativity in the Workplace*

A ONE-DAY WORKSHOP FOR CSSEA

OCTOBER 24, 2012



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WWW.LEADERSHIPMIND.COM

What's my story?

1. What is the story I tell myself about the negative dynamic, person or situation in my organization?
2. What data am I drawing on? Where do I get this information?
3. What assumptions might I be making about this situation?
4. What kinds of feelings do I experience when I tell myself this story?
5. Have I been in a situation that has given rise to similar feelings?
6. How does telling myself this story help or hinder my ability to effectively with the situation?
7. What part do I play in this story?

Ideas into Action

You have the opportunity to work with other individuals who are dealing with a similar challenging dynamic in your organization. This is your opportunity to develop some strategies together to address this dynamic. Use the concepts and ideas we talked about this morning, and use each other to create some new ways of thinking and responding to your particular situation.

You'll have a chance to give a brief presentation on your strategies, so that you will all have the opportunity to learn from one another. Your presentation may take any form you wish; it can be as creative, entertaining, and interesting as you like.

Some of the strategies you discuss may incorporate:

- The “breaking into the cycle” model
- Acknowledging your assumptions, perceptions – your story about the issue
- Asking positive questions
- dialogue and authentic communication, effective confrontation, giving and receiving feedback, collaborative conflict resolution
- An appreciation and recognition of the resources, strengths and gifts you currently have, both within you and within your organization

Suggested Steps

1. Review the common theme that your team is working on.
2. Together, brainstorm a list of all of the strengths, resources, skills, abilities, etc. that you have at your disposal (both within you and within your organization) right now.
3. Create a common vision of what your organization (or whichever department or group is affected by the negativity) will look like and be like once the negative situation is gone. To do this you can use the magic wish technique:

Imagine that you go to sleep tonight and wake up some months later. The negative situation has magically been resolved—it simply no longer exists. What happened? What is it like in your organization now? What are people doing, saying, feeling? What is different now? What is the atmosphere like? What do people say about working in the organization? How do you feel now? Create the most positive image you can of what it is like, now that the negative situation is gone.

4. Working backwards from your image of the positive future, decide what, *specifically*, needs to happen to make this a reality. In particular, what **questions** can you ask of yourselves, and of others that will allow you to unmask your assumptions and approach the situation with clarity and courage? What other steps will you take and engage others to take to address the negativity?

You will have 4 minutes to present your group's finding to the larger group. You are welcome to use the flips, crayons, felts, transparencies, or any other materials available to share your findings.

Dealing with the elephant in the room

- 1. Start small:** Ask at the end of each meeting: What didn't we talk about today that we should have? What should we do about it? Go around the room and ask everyone to speak.
- 2. Check your gut:** Pay attention to your gut feelings. If you feel strongly about something, chances are someone else does too. Speak up.
- 3. Use tentative language:** Say it like this: "I'm not sure if I have this right, but I see it this way or I am concerned about...";
- 4. Use contrasting language:** Say it like this: "What I am not saying is... What I am saying is..."
- 5. First, determine your intent:** Why do you want to speak up? Who benefits more? You or the organization? If it's all about you, think it over again.
- 6. Build the business case:** What is the potential impact both good and bad to the organization of the unnamed elephant? Be concrete about how it could affect the organization's goals or image.
- 7. Don't make it personal:** People ask us, "what if the unnamed elephant is a person?" Define it as actions impacting the organization, not as someone's personality, style or characteristics.
- 8. If the elephant is arrogant leadership:** Try to engage the arrogant person in dialogue about multiple alternatives. Arrogant people often do not realize they are being arrogant so if you can get them to talk, their curiosity may kick in.
- 9. Surface the assumptions you are relying on:** Say: "Here's how I thought. I assumed... because of... What do you see differently?"
- 10. Ask the 6 what's:** "What do we know? What do we not know? What will we never know? What can we agree on? What do we disagree on? What do we need to do to move forward?"

Adapted from www.thinbook.com

Good books and resources for creating a positive workplace

Peter Senge, *The Dance of Change*. New York: Doubleday, 1999

_____, *The Fifth Discipline Fieldbook*. New York: Doubleday, 1994

Daniel Goleman, *Primal Leadership: Realizing the Power of Emotional Intelligence*. New York: Random House

_____, *Destructive Emotions*. New York: Random House, 2003

Hendrie Weisinger, *Emotional Intelligence at Work*, Jossey-Bass, 1998

Isaacs, William. *Dialogue and the Art of Thinking Together*. Currency, New York. 1999.

Jon Kabat-Zinn, *Full Catastrophe Living*. New York: Doubleday, 1990

Peter Frost, *Toxic Emotions at Work*. Boston: Harvard Business Press, 2003

R. Brian Stanfield, General Editor, *The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 Ways to Access Group Wisdom in the Workplace*, New Society Publishers, 2000

Rosenberg, Marshall. *Nonviolent Communication: A Language of Life*. PuddleDancer Press, California. 2003.

Rosenberg, Marshall. *Speak Peace in a World of Conflict*:. PuddleDancer Press, California. 2005

Stanfield, Brian R. *The Art of Focused Conversation: 100 ways to access group wisdom in the workplace*. New Society Publishers, Gabriola Island, BC. 2004

Wheatley, Margaret. *Turning to One Another: Simple Conversations to Restore Hope to the Future*.. Berrett-Koehler Publishers, San Francisco. 2002.

Lew Childre, *Freeze Frame*. Boulder Creek, California, Planetary Publications, 1998