



No One Gets to Be **wrong**

By Julie Fuimano, Executive Coach

Have you ever been told you were wrong for feeling a certain way or for expressing an opinion that was contrary to the beliefs of others? How did it feel? It's happened to each of us at some point, and no, it never feels good to be made wrong for thinking a certain way. You feel as though you are being judged and are not accepted for who you are. It often makes you question yourself, your beliefs, and your decisions. Additionally, if your sense of self or self-esteem is already somewhat fragile, it can send you into a negative downward spiral making you shrink and withdraw, or become resentful and angry.

This is an interesting concept because, as a leader, you want to create an environment where people feel comfortable expressing themselves. This means, you set the tone of your unit or department (and your family and community) through your actions and words. If you want to create a work environment that is accepting of diverse thoughts and ideas, then you need to model acceptance for others to follow and use masterful communication techniques to teach others how you want people to treat one another. You also must not permit anything less than the respectful treatment of others. This means that nastiness, gossip, destructive conversations (i.e. complaining, blaming), as well as abusive comments or actions will not be tolerated.

As a leader, embrace the concept that no one is wrong for being who they are. The message you send is, "Who you are is wonderful as you are, and I accept you." It's about creating a safe space that allows each individual the ability to simply be himself or herself. You must learn to separate the person from the behavior and actions. The person is wonderful. Sometimes, people don't do wonderful things. That does not make them wrong as a person. There's a difference. They have the right to make mistakes; they are human. You can certainly redirect the

behavior and, as a leader, you must. You need to set clear expectations about how people should treat others in your presence and in your department or else they will continue to do whatever they have always done. Unless you tell people what you expect and demonstrate through your own behaviors, they will not know their behavior is inappropriate. This means you need to speak up whenever something occurs that does not feel good. It is often how we feel that brings our attention to something being inappropriate. When you say nothing, it sends the message that the behavior is okay and the behavior will repeat.

There are three things to consider. The first is that everyone is right in his or her own minds. Given the information they have right now, their background, experience and education, they have formulated certain conclusions and to this person, those conclusions make sense. They have the right to think the way they do. Hopefully, they are open to receive new information so they can learn and grow. They may not be, and that is not about you. It is about them.

The second is that language matters. Say what you need to say but in a way that respects and honors the other person. For

instance, you can offer an opinion as a suggestion, "Perhaps you could consider..." Instead of a demand, "Don't do it that way. It's done this way." and your message will be received differently. As a leader, sometimes you do need to be direct and tell people to do things a certain way. Even then, tell the person what you need them to know without putting them down for not doing it right. "If you do it this way, then you are going to get the proper result." Make sure, however, that you are not expecting them to behave in the way you would. Allow people the right to express their creativity and individuality when appropriate.

The third thing to know is that sometimes people make mistakes. A good leader recognizes that mistakes are part of learning. The person lacks knowledge or is ill informed. Remember that in their mind, they are right and you cannot dispute that. If you try, you'll find yourself in an argument. Instead, frame your comments in a way that softens the impact so that the person can be receptive to hear you. Begin the conversation by trying to understand their perspective and their reasons for acting the way they did. Then you can share your perspective or offer new information for them to come to different conclusions.

People do the very best they know how to do in any given moment. Sometimes, people need more information or they need direction. That does not make the person less of an individual. They are human. Treating them as wrong makes the person feel 'less than'. The impact is to diminish the person, per-



haps elevate yourself, and create an environment of hierarchy and judgment which sounds like, "I know better than you." It translates to, "You are bad. I am good." And you know what, this kind of environment feels bad!

By operating under the framework that people are inherently good and by accepting people right where they are in their own personal evolution, you create the space for the acceptance of individuality and for diversity to flourish. You allow people the freedom to express themselves for who they are and this is the path to creating an environment rich with respect and compassion. It starts with each encounter; each day in everyday, begin to treat others in a way that demonstrates respect for who they are. Make it safe for them to just be themselves. Often people need to be taught to enjoy each other. Amazing things will start to occur. You'll begin to experience so much more of what's possible for people to become. You'll start to experience an uplifting and positive environment where people appreciate each other and welcome each other's comments and feedback. People inherently want to learn and to grow themselves. They want to access their potential; they just don't always know how. By making it safe for people to access their greatness, by learning to wonder about each other, by sharing what we appreciate about each other and by no longer tolerating inappropriate behaviors, we create an environment that nurtures our success as individuals, as organizations and as human beings.



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