

Staying Positive

in a **Negative** Environment

By Julie Fuimano, Executive Coach

Probably one of the hardest things we must do as leaders is to stay positive when everyone else around us is negative. It's not easy to maintain a positive attitude and not be drained or consumed by the negativity that surrounds you. But as a leader, that's exactly what you must do. You have the opportunity to be the beacon of light for others around you. You can demonstrate and teach by your actions and responses how to behave in an appropriate, positive and professional manner.

It's easy to be positive in a positive environment. It's when things are emotionally draining and negative that you are challenged to step up to the plate and behave differently. By doing so, you make a difference—a positive impact that sends ripples throughout the community in which you work. The fact is that positive energy catches on just as quickly as negative energy. Sometimes, people are simply stuck in a habit or pattern of behavior. They are accustomed to acting a certain way. If the environment is really caustic, then it has been that way for a long time. This is what people are used to; it's familiar to them and it may be all they know. In addition, by the very fact that it's been happening this way for this long and no one has done enough to change it, it's considered "acceptable" even though it's not.

It takes some time and effort on your part, as well as a commitment to do something differently in order to create sustainable change. You must be willing to identify and stop tolerating what's not working, do the right thing even if it's unpopular at first, and then teach others to do the same.

Here are five things you can do to be the *POSITIVE* force in your workplace.

OBSERVE YOURSELF IN ACTION. In what ways are you contributing to the negativity around you? Are you listening to gossip or participating



in conversations where the only focus is to denigrate, diminish or criticize people or things? If the conversation feels bad, it's probably negative. Stop being negative! Stop saying or doing anything that is negative. It all starts with you. Language matters. Everything you say has an impact and when you say something negative, does it dishonor the person you're speaking about and the person with whom you are speaking? It makes you feel bad even if you don't realize it. Putting someone else down is disrespectful of them and it disrespects you. Learn to respect people's humanity and their right to be themselves. Complaining without end does not focus on creating solutions; rather its impact is only to perpetuate and magnify the problem wasting everyone's precious time and energy.

RECOGNIZE NEGATIVITY WHEN IT OCCURS AROUND YOU. SOMETIMES, YOU CAN EVEN FEEL YOUR ENERGY BEING DRAINED BY THE WORDS BEING SPOKEN. Again, if it feels bad or uncomfortable then it's negative. These feelings are your inner messengers. They are a form of intelli-

gence similar to a tap on the shoulder letting you know something is not right. How do you feel? What is happening? What behavior is being displayed? If you can identify what is happening, then you can make good choices about handling it. The first step is awareness.

SPEAK UP! TELL THE OTHER PERSON HOW YOU FEEL. Use the words, "This doesn't work for me." It's non-judgmental and it's about you, not them. People often don't realize they are being negative. Point out to the person that they are being negative in a gentle and caring way. "Do you realize you are complaining?" Sometimes, just bringing it to their attention is enough to shift the conversation. Over time, people will learn what they can and cannot talk about with you and it won't be an issue. If you say nothing, then your silence gives them permission to continue.

MAKE YOUR CONVERSATIONS CONSTRUCTIVE, THE CONVERSATION SHOULD BE POSITIVE, MEANINGFUL AND BENEFICIAL. What's the point or purpose of the conversation? Is it to hurt or help? At the end of the conversation, what would you like to have happen? Is there an action step to take? Constructive conversations feel good. They are empowering and have the effect of leaving people a little better off from having participated in them. Become the kind of person who takes your time seriously and who takes your words seriously!

OFFER PRAISE! IT'S AMAZING WHAT A FEW WORDS OF PRAISE AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENT CAN DO TO MAKE PEOPLE FEEL GOOD. You want people to feel good after being in your presence. You want to be the kind of person people gravitate to because they know they will be uplifted by you, not put down or drained of their life-sustaining energy.

Learning how to be positive as you navigate through life is part of life's lessons. No matter what is going on around you, you control your inner environment and how you choose to respond to external events and situations. It's your responsibility to become the kind of person you enjoy being and with whom others enjoy being around. It takes a true leader to walk a path different from the crowd. So when others are negative, stretch your boldness muscles and be positive in spite of what others do or think. It's the only way to create a ripple of change. We know that from small beginnings come great things. If each of us does our part, then slowly but surely, we will make a difference in our work environment and the community at large.



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