

JUICY WORK NEWS

Updates from The Learning Advantage

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THE Learning Advantage



Musings – Initiation Rites . . . and Wrongs

A common complaint I hear from clients who've begun a new job is their embarrassment and hurt when they accidentally barbeque a sacred cow or step on an organizational landmine. Longtime employees know about these hazards, but they refrain from pointing them out, sometimes even egging newcomers on into dangerous territory.

Shortly after John joined his firm's finance team, he had a question about a report. His co-worker told him to ask Beth, another co-worker. But when he knocked on Beth's office door, he was promptly yelled at for interrupting her while she was doing the monthly close. John's co-workers were watching and laughed as he came out chewed to a nub. They knew not to interrupt Beth during this time and had sent him in knowing what would happen. Was it a hazing ritual or just "mean guy" behavior? Regardless, John wasn't sure he could trust his colleagues, so he rarely sought their advice.

During new employee orientation, Laurretta learned that "speaking truth to power" was one of the company's key values. In the training, she heard examples of how employees who had discovered problems or who had disagreed with management politely raised the issue to great effect. At the all-hands meeting that week, the CEO reiterated that he wanted to hear from every employee and learn their perspectives on how to do things better. Laurretta asked her co-workers if they thought the CEO was serious about wanting to get feedback. They encouraged her to talk to him. Sadly, he was not open to feedback about his own behavior, and shortly after the conversation she was reassigned to another company location miles away from her home. She vowed that in the future she would hold her tongue.

Why not prepare new colleagues and warn them of landmines before they step on them? When we help colleagues succeed we create a healthy organization and encourage collaboration. When we don't take care of colleagues we break trust and make it harder to get work done.

[Sandy](#)



Sandy Mobley

Ask Sandy

Should people speak up?

Several clients have 'toxic' bosses and they have thought about complaining to the boss' boss or HR. All of their companies say the conversation will be confidential and they promise no reprisals.

Rebecca worked for a man who only promoted men. The men on his team were allowed to bully others. Her talent was undeniable and the business leaders she supported were positive about her. There had been so many complaints about her boss, Larry, that HR finally did an investigation. Sure enough, the data was consistent with what Rebecca had experienced –

verbal abuse, bullying, and lack of inclusion for the female staff members. When the data was shown to Larry's boss, the COO, he chose to do nothing about it. All the employees felt betrayed. Shortly after the investigation, Rebecca was moved to a less visible position when Larry reorganized his division. The head of HR who conducted the interviews went to another company where the values were more in line with hers.

Krista, a manager in a government agency, stood up for a younger female supervisor when Mark, a supervisor on another team refused to do the work for his department. Further, Mark yelled at the young woman in front of others. Krista referred to the organization's 'no harassment policy' and asked her boss who was also Mark's boss to take action. The only action was that the female supervisor was re-assigned and Krista was told that she could go to her next assignment early.

Ken was great as an auditor but he wasn't part of the 'club' of guys who played golf together and went to happy hours. He was a family man and wanted to spend time with his family. He noticed that junior colleagues who did play golf were getting moved to higher positions while he stayed at the same level. When he tried to ask his boss for feedback, he was told that he was doing a good job and should just be patient. He has been patient for two years since that conversation and no promotion has come for him. Should he raise this issue again?

Linda had a boss who was promoted above his level of competence. He missed meetings and blamed his admin. He failed to complete assigned projects and blamed his staff. When Linda was offered a job in another group and told him she was leaving, he verbally abused her and said he was glad to see her go. He badmouthed her to the new manager who reported it to HR. The new manager didn't want to take on his peer but couldn't let the incident go. HR tried to get confirmation from Linda but she chose to say nothing negative about him. She said, "What good would it do?" It would be a 'he-said, she-said' situation and she had no confidence that any good would come from it.

How can we get rid of abusive managers when the system is flawed? The few brave people who speak up do so at their own peril. Even if they are exonerated, they carry the stigma of ratting out the boss and other managers are fearful that they will be criticized too.

And how can we trust HR when their job is to protect the company – not the employee? What is the impact on the HR person who holds a leader accountable for his behavior? Would the HR person be protected or have to look for another job?

Speaking up is an individual decision and different for each person. Sadly, most people find it better to find another job than to speak up and the bad bosses aren't held accountable.

Learning for Leaders – Weigh the potential risks and benefits of speaking up. Ask around and learn how similar situations have worked out for others.

Coaches Corner – Support your clients in understanding their options when working for toxic bosses.

If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com



Overcoming Fear of Public Speaking with Positive Reprogramming

Many of my clients tell me they "hate public speaking" and dread giving presentations to large groups. This is troubling because the ability to share one's expertise, lessons learned, and vision can be crucial to career advancement and job satisfaction. It is the rare leader who is never called upon to present the organization's strategy or explain a change the organization is undertaking. And speaking at conferences is great for networking, recruiting new talent, learning and sharing best practices, and gaining visibility in a company and an industry.

The first step in overcoming glossophobia is to stop giving it power. When you say you hate or fear something, you build up a resistance that gets stronger over time. But if instead you say, "I don't enjoy public speaking yet," you lay the possibility for enjoying it eventually.

The next step to overcoming a fear is to gradually and increasingly expose yourself to it. Begin by identifying safe situations where your nascent public speaking skills won't be marked against you. This can be in front of friends, in a presentation skills class, or at Toastmasters, a non-profit organization where members improve their public speaking skills through practice and educational support. The best public speakers built their skill over time and with practice. Your initial practice sessions may feel less intimidating if you speak about a subject you enjoy.

When I drill down on what is behind a client's anxiety, I usually find they're afraid of either the audience or the topic. If you fear the audience, plan ahead to meet some of the people who will attend your presentation. Ask them what they are interested in hearing and learning. This will give you insights to tailor your presentation to meet their needs. Another tip is to ask sympathetic friends to sit in the front rows so that you see encouraging faces as you look into the audience. Looking at people you know can feel more comfortable than looking out at a nameless audience.

Do the Research

There is only one way to overcome anxiety about the content: do the research and become grounded on the topic before you have to speak. Knowing you have a firm grasp on the topic goes a long way to allaying fears. Again, practice with friends who have knowledge of the topic and can give you feedback on both the substance and style of your presentation.

Even after preparation and practice, I find some people have built such a powerful negative mindset about presenting that they are still fearful. This was the case with Greg, a senior executive I coached who was a competent presenter and expert on the topic. But he was so afraid that he sweated profusely when presenting; don't think hanky, he kept a towel within reach. When I asked him what he was thinking, feeling, seeing, and hearing when he imagined himself presenting, all of the images were negative.

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