

JUICY WORK NEWS

Updates from The Learning Advantage

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THE Learning Advantage

Mobley's Musings– Don't wait for a fairy godmother

I grew up loving fairy tales. Good always vanquished evil. The princess was freed from the dragon's liar and won the heart of the handsome prince. And everyone lived happily ever after. What a crock!

I am an eternal — some would say “terminal” — optimist, yearning for goodness to prevail and happily-ever-after endings for my friends and clients. Naturally, I'm disappointed when reality comes up short. While wanting happy endings isn't bad, the danger comes with dwelling on a poor outcome. We spend too much time wallowing in “life isn't fair” self-pity when we ought to be figuring out how to salvage the situation. Worse, fairy tale endings teach us to expect a white knight to save us at the price of abandoning our own power.

Modern fairy tales like Ella Enchanted and Neverwhere present people who grow stronger from adversity, discovering abilities they weren't aware of. In real life, people grow more from difficult situations, especially when they are self-aware and open to what they can learn.

Sandy



Sandy Mobley

Ask Sandy

Avoiding Learned Helplessness

What should leaders do when staff seeks their help without trying to solve the problem first? Some leaders feel it is their job to solve employees' challenges, while others are annoyed when staff always pester them for guidance. It's a conundrum: As a leader, you have the expertise that can benefit them, but because you're also responsible for developing their skills, you don't want them to become dependent on you.

An easy way to be helpful without enabling “learned helplessness” is to ask the staff person what they've tried so far. If the answer is, “I came to you,” then they aren't taking the initiative to figure out how to solve problems. In that case, I ask them how they might find the solution and coach them through multiple alternatives. This helps me assess their problem-solving skills and fine-tune their approach. It also lets them know I have confidence in them to find the right answers.

A similar approach works with people who have done some research and hit a wall. By asking what they've tried, what worked, and what didn't work I can lead them in a better direction. It also gives me insight into their thought process.

When you solve problems for your staff, you are depriving them the opportunity to learn on their own and sending a message (consciously or unconsciously) that they're not smart enough to figure things out. When learned helplessness goes unchecked, you become the first stop when problems occur and your workload grows while your employees' skills stagnate.

Learning for Leaders – Allow employees to struggle a bit before helping. It builds their skills and confidence.

Coaches Corner – Ask your client how they approach employees needing help. Fine-tune the approach if needed.

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



Advice for Prophets: Go Outside to Get In

Have you ever made a recommendation to leadership that fell on deaf ears, but then a consultant, new employee or customer makes the recommendation and all of a sudden leadership thinks it's the best idea since cupholders in cars? Leaders seem to believe people outside the organization have more credibility than their own staff. This “prophet in your own land” syndrome can be infuriating. There are ways around it, but you may have to swallow your pride of idea ownership.

What makes outside advice seem more credible? Perhaps senior executives don't want to acknowledge that an underling has a good idea because they're embarrassed that they hadn't thought of it first. In highly competitive organizations, peers may feel threatened by another person's idea. Fearful they'll be passed over for promotion, they bad-mouth the idea to leadership. But no one feels threatened when an outside consultant presents a great idea. After all, that's what they're being paid to do. It isn't likely the consultant will take the leader's job; in fact, having hired the consultant may even burnish the leader's reputation if the idea is accepted.

Prophet Being Ignored

If you're feeling like a prophet being ignored in your own land, an “outside-in” approach to selling your ideas may be your best option. You'll need to identify someone outside the organization to sponsor your idea. For example, you might consider having one of your organization's clients suggest your idea to leadership.

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