



Mobley's Musings: Appreciation and a New Year's Wish

As I begin the sixth year of my newsletter, I want to thank the courageous and generous leaders with whom I have the honor to work. They have labored tirelessly to create positive work environments despite the COVID-imposed challenges of working from home and connecting virtually instead of in person. Hearing their stories and their creative ways to make sure their staff feel empowered and appreciated gives me so much insight and inspiration for many of the articles you read.

The newsletter would not happen without the work of three talented individuals. My editor, Christine Bruns, makes my ideas clearer and more comprehensible and occasionally calls me on questionable ideas before I step on the land mine. My graphics designer, Becky Beauman, formats my articles and finds just the right photos to illustrate what I'm saying, often with very short lead times due to my own delays in getting final drafts to her. My publicist, Nancy Valent, is a master of social media and publishes the newsletter in a format that works on multiple platforms. She's always seeking new channels for publishing my work and getting my messages out to help leaders. I appreciate my team and know their support is invaluable.

As we move into 2022, I wish you work that engages and supports you, a team that makes work fun, and opportunities to make a difference in the world. The world needs all of us to be our best and know that what we do matters.

Sandy



Ask Sandy: Labels Matter

Often clients come to me describing or labeling a situation as "toxic" or "contentious." I suggest they view the situation objectively and approach it like Detective Joe Friday on the old TV series "Dragnet": "Just the facts, ma'am."

How you label a situation can affect your emotions and approach. If you're seeking clarity about your relationship with a co-worker or family member, you might label that a "difficult" conversation because it could touch on sensitive issues. You anticipate pushback, which in turn puts you in a defensive mindset.

But if you think of the conversation as "clarity finding," you remove the emotions.

In dealing with conflict, perspective taking is a constructive approach that requires you to drop labels. It involves stepping back from what you think is going on and coming up with alternative and equally plausible possibilities. One of my clients told me his boss hated him and he had to find another job. I asked what led him to that conclusion and he said it was because he was never left in charge when the boss went out of town. I asked him to come up with two other possible reasons for being overlooked. "Well, I am the most junior of my peers," he said, "so maybe my boss chooses people based on seniority." I told him that sounded plausible and asked for another possibility. He explained that in his role he had the most interactions with customers. "Maybe my boss thinks doing both my job and hers would be too much stress on me and she doesn't want customer service to suffer while she's away." By coming up with alternative reasons for not being left in charge, the feeling that he was "hated" diminished.

With his new perspective, my client's next step was to calmly ask his boss if there was a reason he wasn't left in charge. Sure enough, she told him she considered his customer service interactions as critical to the success of the business and even noted how much she valued him in that role. Far from being hated, he was appreciated. Had he acted on the false narrative he'd created he would have quit for no good reason.

When managers label their employees — be it lazy, slow, brilliant, strategic, or troublesome — they often end up biasing their behavior toward them. In studies where teachers were told certain children were smarter than others, the teachers unconsciously devoted more attention to the smart kids who then performed better, even though those children were not smarter than the others. The labels became self-fulfilling and unfairly deprived others.

If we look for the good in all of our employees and seek the facts behind their behavior instead of judging and labeling it, we will have more positive and productive workplaces.

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



Don't Feed Your Head Junk Food

This time of year people tend to think about changes they want to make. New Year's resolutions often center on physical health, like exercising more or losing weight. An equally important area to focus on is mental and emotional health.

Imagine a steady diet of junk food — chips, cookies, soft drinks, ice cream — and the effects it would have on your body, like high blood pressure, diabetes, heart disease, and obesity, just to mention a few. We can easily recognize how eating junk food can ruin our physical health. But what about the junk food we feed our minds? I've seen clients lose their confidence during meetings and presentations because they have been feasting on self-criticism and self-doubt, envy, arrogance, and anger.

Self-criticism and self-doubt result from self-talk that diminishes how you view yourself. It sounds like:

- I don't know what I'm talking about.
- No one thinks I deserve having this role.
- I'm not smart enough, confident enough, articulate enough for this job.
- I'm an imposter.
- I don't look like an executive.

Envy, arrogance, and anger come from self-talk that sounds like:

- Look how great I am.
- I'm smarter than my peers; they should work for me.
- How did they get promoted?
- I should be the one the boss chooses for high-visibility projects.
- I'm fed up with being overlooked.

Instead of being stuck in their own heads, great leaders focus on connecting with their team members and their audience. They feel confident and at ease, and meeting their audience's needs is foremost in their mind. Their self-talk sounds like:

- This is a great topic; I'm excited to be sharing it.
- I'm feeling good about my relationship with the group.
- I'm here to help others learn, make decisions, solve problems.
- Hmm, I don't know the answer to that question. I'll get back to everyone later with an answer.

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