JUICY WORK NEWS

Updates from The Learning Advantage

The **Learning Advantage**

Mobley's Musings– When Being Right is Wrong

I find many clients get stuck when they're proven right about something, everyone knows they're right, but no one will acknowledge they're right. Being denied this recognition sticks in their craw and they don't understand why no one will admit they were right. But the flip side—why no one will admit to being wrong—is more understandable.

One client's division lost a significant sale because their proposal bid was much higher than their competitors. My client knew they were too high, told everyone who would listen, but his concerns were ignored. And sure enough, he was right. He'd like someone to acknowledge that fact, but everyone else just wants to move on. They may have even known he was right at the time, but for some reason, they felt the price was justifiable. Having to admit they were wrong feels like being shamed and they don't want to go there.

Pride often gets in our way, along with the desire to avoid blame. Two directors were at odds over a situation where both had culpability. They couldn't move forward because each felt they were right and the other wrong. But what would be the cost if one took the blame, even if it weren't deserved? The organization had already moved on so repercussions were unlikely. And might there be a potential benefit to taking the blame? Perhaps the relationship between the directors could be salvaged and both could put the situation behind them.

Early in our marriage my husband and I went to a counselor eager to explain why we each felt we were the injured party and the other was to blame. After listening to us, he said, "You are like two lawyers, each arguing your point of view and wanting to be right. Would you rather be right or be happy?" That wisdom has served us well for 30 years of marriage.

Giving a little, admitting fault even when you don't think you were in the wrong, and apologizing sincerely can go a long way to healing negative situations. Even if your intentions were good, your actions well-meaning, and the other person simply misunderstood, saying you are sorry allows you to move on, and perhaps helps the other person stop holding on to a perceived slight.

As a wise client once put it, "You may have the right of way, but are you going to hit a pedestrian to prove it?"

Sandy

Ask Sandy

How's Your Career, Metaphorically Speaking?

When I ask clients how they feel about their careers, sometimes words escape them. They may feel stuck in their career but can't explain why. One way to jumpstart* the conversation is to suggest using a metaphor and explore how it relates to their situation. That shift in perspective can lead to clarity and insights.

Sandy Mobley

One of my clients said his career seemed to have plateaued. I asked him to give me a metaphor to describe the situation. "It's like I'm getting into an elevator and pushing the button for the penthouse," he said, "but I never get there because other people keep pushing the buttons and slowing me down." This simple statement led to a deeper conversation about what he felt others were doing that slowed his career. Once he examined their actions and the ways he responded to them, he had gained insights into what he could do to accelerate promotions along his career path.

Another client said her career was like being a race car driver on a track. But instead of enjoying the speed and power of the vehicle, she felt like she was just going around and around with no endpoint. In discussing what an endpoint would be like, she described clear goals and metrics to reach them. Over the course of our next few meetings, we explored ways for her to stop going in circles, get back on track to reach her goals, and regain control of her career.

While sports metaphors tend to dominate business discussions, consider one of these less expected comparisons:

- If my career were a garden, it would be . . .
- If my career were a ship, it would be . . .
- If my career were a restaurant, it would be . . .
- If my career were a movie, it would be . . .

Just remember that a metaphor doesn't need to be a perfect fit to reveal underlying truths. It's a stretching exercise* that prepares you for your next steps.

*See what I did there?

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

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Getting Better at Managing Conflict

The potential for conflict is a given in most human interactions. Rather than trying to resolve conflict in the moment when tempers flare and emotions run high, effective leaders adopt a proactive approach that encourages constructive conflict behaviors and minimizes destructive conflict behaviors.

To help clients get better at managing conflict, I use an assessment tool that identifies individual preferences in using constructive and destructive behaviors. The assessment provides a guide to which behaviors to leverage and which to curtail.

Constructive conflict behaviors that can reduce and perhaps eliminate conflict are:

- Perspective Taking
- Creating Solutions
- Expressing Emotions
- Reaching Out
- Reflective Thinking
- Delay Responding
- Adapting

Some of these behaviors, such as Creating Solutions, Reaching Out, Delay Responding, and Adapting, are self-explanatory; others may need some clarification. Perspective Taking is the act of imagining how another person feels or what they may be thinking. This behavior helps you find positive reasons for the person's actions or point of view. It encourages curiosity and helps you remain calm and not rush to judgment. It may take some time to build this muscle, but it is well worth the effort.

Likewise, Reflective Thinking engages curiosity and self-awareness and can lead to better self-management during conflict. This behavior involves analyzing a situation and weighing pros and cons before proceeding. It's obvious what Expressing Emotions means, but the key is doing it in a healthy, positive way. When done constructively Expressing Emotions demonstrates openness and vulnerability and can build trust with others. When people put on "poker faces" and block their emotions, others can mistrust their motives because they can't see what's going on beneath the surface.

Applied singly or in combination, constructive conflict behaviors can diffuse a situation and lead to workable solutions. When Kevin and Thomas both wanted first dibs on the IT team's resources for their projects, Thomas went to the manager to plead his case. He noted that his last two projects had been successful while Kevin's had not. When Kevin learned what Thomas had done he was hurt and angry.

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