



Mobley's Musings- People Are More Than Meets the Eye

All too often we observe a behavior in someone and then brand them based on that behavior alone. For example, Pamela constantly talks about her prior career as CEO of a multi-billion-dollar organization, being sure to drop the names of important people she worked with. An observer might think she is self-absorbed or entirely too full of herself. But I got to know her when we both did volunteer work for a non-profit, and I learned that since she retired 6 years ago, she has been taking care of her mother who has dementia. As a result, much of her day is spent alone with her mother. It's no wonder that when she finally gets to be among other people, she is hungry to talk and share her experiences. What may sound like boasting is her attempt to be interesting and engaging.

Don't be too quick to discount someone based on a certain behavior. Get to know them in the context of their lived experience and you'll develop a deeper, more nuanced understanding of what drives them.



Ask Sandy How to put teeth into feedback

Some clients tell me that even though they regularly provide feedback to employees, it doesn't seem to have an effect. They do not change. It reminds me of a friend who constantly had to tell her dog to get off the couch. The dog would jump down but a short while later would jump back on the couch. Again, she'd tell the dog to get down. This would go on for some time but at some point, she would give up. The dog realized all he had to do was wait her out and eventually he would be able to rest in peace on the couch. Finally, my friend decided it was time the dog learned who was boss. She got a collar that would give the dog a mild shock if he jumped on the couch and in no time, the dog learned.

Likewise, employees can become impervious to criticism when they realize there are no consequences to their bad behavior. If you've been gumming employees with polite feedback that they ignore, it may be time to put some teeth into it. Begin by putting your concerns in writing and state that the employee must make immediate and consistent improvement or else. Be sure to spell out exactly what the "or else" is. If possible, hand your memo directly to the employee so you know they received it and they know you mean business. If they continue to ignore your reprimand, you will have to hold them accountable and invoke your "or else" clause.

When an employee understands there are real consequences to bad behavior, they are more likely to stop the behavior. In any disciplinary situation, be sure to follow the progressive escalation process your company supports. Getting Human Resources involved also lets the employee know you are serious and protects you from potential complaints.

One final thought about the "or else": be sure you can deliver on the consequences. I recall a mother in a grocery store telling her son that if he did whatever was bothering her one more time, she would kill him. We all know she wouldn't carry through on that threat. Save the hyperbole and cite consequences that are real and meaningful.

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



Build Your Personal Brand

Whether you're actively cultivating it or not, you have a personal brand. You and your work create an impression that colleagues and clients factor in to how they interact with you. If you are unaware of how you are perceived, ask colleagues to describe your brand. Would they offer words like trustworthy, creative, funny or positive? Might they also mention a tendency to procrastinate, argue or promote unrealistic expectations?

The less well known you are, the more first impressions and perceptions create your brand. You may be a brilliant analyst, but if you're meeting with people who don't know your work and you keep them waiting, their impression may be that you are overextended or forgetful at best, or arrogant and inconsiderate at worse.

When those same people get to know you better, they may be able to put their first impressions into context: you tend to be late to meetings because you're conscientious, working right up to, and often beyond, the last minute to address a customer's concerns. They can put your behavior into context because they have a full picture of you—your values, priorities, character—and your work product.

But why wait for others to define—rightly or wrongly—your brand? Taking the time to define your best brand and proactively advance it can pay off in ways you may never even realize.

How to build your best brand

Think about what a brand is intended to do. Companies with strong brands, such as Apple, Lancome, Mercedes and McDonald's, promote specific characteristics that their target customers appreciate, be it sophisticated style, low cost, mainstream popularity or advanced engineering. Customers' expectations are shaped by the brand. Likewise, you want your brand to help people know what they can expect from you.

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