Mobley's Musings: Whose Opinion Matters?

When she won the best supporting actress award at this year's Academy Awards, Jamie Lee Curtis was magnanimous in recognizing her fellow actors and thanking the people who go to her movies. What surprised me was when she mentioned her deceased parents, Janet Leigh and Tony Curtis, had both been nominated in their long careers but had never won an Oscar. She looked up to heaven and said, "I won an Oscar!" Even after all her success she still cares what her parents think.

Noted author, professor, and TED talk presenter Brene Brown marveled how her success prompted some critics to disparage not just her presentation but her hair style and clothing as well. That led her to think deeply about whose feedback really mattered. She realized that if the person giving feedback was a renowned keynote speaker pulling in $10,000 per session, she would be very open to their advice. And of course, she cared what her mentors and family thought. But why should she care about the opinions of people who had never risked their reputations by taking to the public stage, who hadn't labored over long months of research, and who had no expertise in her particular field — people who weren't, in the words of Theodore Roosevelt, "in the arena." She tore off a one-inch square piece of paper and wrote the names of the people from whom she wanted feedback, deciding to ignore the voices of the people who risked nothing while taking shots at her from the cheap seats.

In my somatic leadership training, we practiced saying "no thank you" to people whose feedback we didn't want while accepting feedback from people whose opinion we valued. What we feel and think are often expressed by how we hold our body. If your chest deflates or your shoulders slump when you get negative feedback, consider whether you are open to feedback from that person based on their ability to assess your actions. If you feel yourself puffing up, raising your voice, or preparing to argue, center yourself and again assess if the feedback is valid or useful.

The more you can clearly assess how you are doing, the less you will care about feedback from those who are not in your arena. If it is useful, use it and learn. If it is not, let it go.

Ask Sandy
How Not to Step on Others Conversationally

In face-to-face conversations, people sometimes jump in to speak before the other person has finished having their say. Stepping on others conversationally is more common on phone or video calls where it's hard to tell if the speaker is pausing or has finished talking. Being interrupted or having someone else talk over you is counterproductive to good discussions, and for some people it can be demoralizing.

The first step to stop stepping on others is to recognize when you're doing it. In feedback, one client was surprised to learn that he cut people off on calls. He acknowledged that he didn't always know when people were finished speaking and admitted that he can be impatient with people who don't think or talk as quickly as he does. He needed to pay better attention to verbal cues and temper his eagerness to contribute.

For another client I suggested that she count to three to make sure the other speaker was finished. While the technique worked sometimes, she said, more often other people jumped into the conversational vacuum. On a call with several Type A coworkers, waiting even a few seconds means she may never be able to get a word in.

During online meetings, some clients use the application's "raise hand" feature. It's a useful tool, but only if everyone agrees to use it. Given the number of violations I've seen, I'm surprised someone hasn't invented a virtual Koosh ball that allows only the person holding it to talk.

In an organization where many people have military backgrounds, I've noticed that when a person has finished speaking, they say "over" as they would in a radio transmission. This practice is particularly helpful when some of the people on the call are overseas and there is a lag in the connection. Stepping on each other almost becomes comical when the conversation is between people on opposite sides of the globe.

Whatever method you choose to stop stepping on each other, make sure everyone agrees to use it and it is used consistently. Rigorous enforcement of the "No Stepping Rule" will keep people from backsliding and help ensure productive discussions.

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

Remote or Hybrid: Everything Old is New Again

Whether you love it, hate it, or just deal with it, remote work is here to stay. At Ladders, a career advice and job search service focused on positions that pay over $100,000, data researchers see an ongoing trend toward hybrid workplaces. According to their data, 25 percent of work was remote in 2022 and that share will continue to increase in 2023. Remote opportunities for high-paying jobs went from 4 percent pre-pandemic to over 9 percent today.

It has been three years since we moved to hybrid workplaces and the novelty seems to have worn off and a lack of professionalism has crept in. In video meetings, some people don't turn their cameras on or go on mute, and often multiple conversations are needed on the same topic because people aren't fully present. To improve engagement, more companies are requiring employees to come back to the office.

There are lots of reasons that engagement and professionalism falter in remote workplaces, but the solutions are well known. They have been part of the pre-pandemic office environment for decades, but in a virtual environment they are often overlooked. Some of these solutions may need to be tweaked for remote work, but the fundamentals remain the same.

Set Norms and Clear Expectations

Working from home does not mean anything goes and people are free to decide their own work hours. More attention needs to be paid to the best practices for managing staff working remotely. For example, managers should establish and communicate policies such as:

• Core hours when people are expected to be available.

• Procedures for informing managers and team members when a staff member won't be available during core hours.

• Schedules for individuals who prefer to work outside typical hours.

Team members should also be informed of expectations for virtual meetings, including:

• Participants' cameras must be on.

• Home offices should feature adequate lighting so participants can see each other.

• Multi-tasking is not allowed.

• Participants are expected to wear work-appropriate clothing.

Create and Circulate Agendas

Agendas are necessary whether a meeting is in-person or virtual. When sent out in advance, an agenda allows people to prepare their thoughts and ideas, leading to more productive conversations.

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