



## Mobley's Musings: Why Friends Come and Go

A client recently lamented the loss of a friend. The friend had not died; however, it was their friendship that had faded away. It's natural to feel sad when a friendship ends, but a popular meme has helped me put these relationships into perspective. It says some friendships develop for a reason, some for a season, and some for a lifetime. Understanding why someone has come into your life can help you accept it when they leave.

One reason a relationship might develop is that you are working together. You become good office friends, enjoy each other's company, and assist each other with work-related problems. But if one of you takes another job it becomes difficult to maintain the friendship. Another reason people enter your life is to teach you something, either directly — like a coach who helps you improve your golf game — or indirectly through the example they set. I remember co-training with someone who didn't like to share the stage. When participants asked questions, she jumped in and responded, never giving me an opportunity. Her behavior taught me to be mindful when working with others and make sure they had space to demonstrate their strengths and knowledge.

Seasonal relationships could include people you go to school with, colleagues on a project, or members of a committee you've been assigned to. The shared experience, especially if it lasts over the course of several weeks or months, creates a strong connection. But when the semester ends or the project is finished, you meet and call less frequently. The season had come to an end, and you drifted apart.

Then there are the relationships that grow stronger with time. They don't depend on a reason or a season. You both make a concerted effort to stay in touch, share experiences, and be there for each other. If one of you moves away, you don't let distance end your friendship. These are relationships you want to nurture and enjoy for a lifetime.

I find some people have a hard time accepting that a friendship has run its course. All relationships have meaning, even those that end sooner than you might like. No matter how long or short, they're important in shaping who you are.



## Ask Sandy Learning, Not Burning

We've always heard that it's important to learn from our mistakes. But when the stakes are high, what some people learn is that messing up a project, missing a deadline, or quarreling with coworkers will get you burned. Instead of gaining knowledge that helps them improve, the employee is reprimanded, and their confidence takes a hit.

Since part of learning is making mistakes, managers should regard employees' missteps as an opportunity for learning, not burning. When a manager asks questions about what happened, gets a sense of where the person went wrong, and helps them get back on track, the employee learns from the situation and is more likely to do better the next time. Also, the employee can recover from the event with their confidence intact.

But if a manager chides the employee for a mistake without understanding how and why it happened, the employee tends to feel attacked. Fear of being reprimanded can be demotivating and the employee will be reluctant to take risks. This can lead to an organization where people play it safe because the cost of failure is too great.

Many years ago, a very senior leader in the company where I worked asked me to line up speakers for a major sales conference he was hosting. To my horror, one of the speakers I had invited bombed spectacularly. I thought the leader would be furious with me, but instead he asked how I came to choose the speaker and what I had done to prep him. After explaining how I had approached the assignment, he said it seemed I had done the appropriate due diligence and there was nothing more I could have done. He noted that the other speakers I'd invited had done well, and I should be able to find a new person to fill that slot. He told me that he trusted me and knew I was up to the task. Instead of being burned, I felt motivated, and I would always do my best for this leader because of how he treated me.

When an employee makes a mistake, take the time to understand the context surrounding the error and help them learn from it. Your people and your organization will thrive when the fear of being burned is extinguished.

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



## Making Collaboration Work

Lots of organizations tout their collaborative work environments, but collaboration can mean different things to different groups. For some, employees occupying low cubicles or sitting in open bullpens promotes collaboration. For others, collaboration is achieved through a matrix organization where individuals have multiple reporting responsibilities. And still others take collaboration literally, insisting that every task be accomplished by cross-functional teams.

Many organizations recognize the importance of collaboration, but few have broken the code on how to do it successfully. Problems arise when employees are uncertain who owns which initiatives because only the people at the top have the big picture. When territorial issues arise, most people are reluctant to escalate them to the highest level so problems go unresolved. In one organization, all the major divisions have their own department for technical innovation. None have adequate resources and they are loath to give up their resources to other divisions. The result is not collaboration but the starvation of technical innovation.

Collaboration needs to start with a shared goal. When all parties are clear on what success looks like they can work toward that goal. Without an agreement on the desired result, people may be working at cross-purposes.

One organization I worked for had sales goals and manufacturing goals. Sales was measured on the number and dollar value of contracts signed, but because the manufacturing division had adopted lean manufacturing principles, low inventory levels meant that all too often the sales team could not meet their goals because manufacturing didn't make sufficient product. Once the goals were redefined to support overall profit goals, the sales and manufacturing teams worked together to achieve targets that worked for all.

Once the goal is clear, it is important to set up a process to define who owns what parts of the initiative, how you will communicate, how decisions will be made, and how disagreements will be resolved. Typically teams are not privy at a detailed level to what the other teams are working on which can lead to misunderstandings.

For example, in many organizations the product managers think they know what their customers want and insist that the marketing team take their ideas into account when devising promotional strategies. But the marketing team may trust their customer satisfaction surveys and data collection over product managers' anecdotal findings.

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