

Behavioral Differences: *When Getting Along Impacts Getting Ahead* *Turning Potential Into Performance*

Today's business headlines are proof positive that many people don't know how to effectively manage behavioral differences. Daily headlines announce the latest crisis caused by feuding executives and corporate lawsuits. The cost of our differences is apparent in the ongoing chronicle of downsizing, rightsizing, capsizing, litigation and accusations, reorganization and lost vision.

How can you prevent what's happening to "those guys" from happening to your organization? Reflect on your last week at work. How much time did you spend resolving "people problems?" At what cost to productivity and service, to your goals and your bottom line? Inspect every department for the impact of behavioral differences. Are they affecting Purchasing's power to negotiate? What issues are keeping Finance at loggerheads with Marketing? How do you do more, faster, with less, and keep everyone happy? How do you focus on your company's greater vision when your days are eaten up by tasks of mediation?

People problems will not just solve themselves, and it's next to impossible to imagine a business outcome that's not affected by people's ability to work together. Because a business's strategic decisions affect its people first, managing behavioral differences is about more than getting along — it's essential to your financial success.

Unity of purpose is difficult when your workforce is made up of individuals. While each person within your company may have a different strategy for dealing with diversity, you need a single solution that won't interrupt the fast pace of your business. You need a systematic approach to improving workplace interactions that produces positive results in nearly every situation. Is there a learnable strategy that's relatively easy to implement and measure? A strategy that yields greater benefits every time it's applied, and is flexible enough to accommodate the constantly changing needs of your business?

Good news. There is a solution. With a little practice, every individual, no matter what their behavior type, can learn to manage their behavioral differences using the same methods of understanding and adaptation. We just have to take the time to learn how, and then put our knowledge into practice.

First Things First: Focus on Behavior

In nearly every human interaction, you are judged by your behavior. We draw conclusions about others based on our observations of their behavior in a variety of situations, even though we cannot observe the intentions and motivations of their actions. The sum of our observations, although based on inaccurate, incomplete information, determines our opinions of others. Our opinions, whether positive or negative, influence the way we interact.

It's important to note that behavior and personality are not the same thing. Personality includes everything a person is - their hopes, ideas, traits, values, attitudes, abilities, and dreams - as well as their behavior. Behavior itself is what we say and do, and how we say and do it.

Most of the time, our behaviors are the result of ingrained responses - they're habits. We invest effort in analyzing the behaviors of those around us, but don't often consider the impact of our own behaviors. In order to realize more effective relationships, we need turn the looking glass on ourselves.

A Model for Success: Understanding and Managing Interactions

We cannot expect to be able to change the behaviors of those we interact with; in the same way, we all know it is difficult for us to readily change our own behaviors. What we can do is become better observers and better managers of tension. We must maintain effective interpersonal skills, developed by understanding a wide range of behavior. These skills also depend upon the ability to manage our own behavior, and to respond appropriately to the behavior of others. The more we practice, the easier it becomes to gain approval - or social acceptance - from others. The higher our approval rating, the more effective and productive we can be.

The new workplace requires a slight inversion of the Golden Rule: Treat others not as you would like to be treated, but as they would like to be treated. For example, if you're dealing with a highly efficient department head, go to the meeting prepared to get down to business quickly. If your customer likes to show you pictures of his kids on the ski slopes, respond with genuine interest and warmth. If your prospect wants to see evidence of your knowledge, go the extra mile to supply support documentation. When we adapt our behavior to another's needs, we increase the level of acceptance or approval we receive from that person and enhance our chances for interpersonal success.

Today's ever-changing business environments make the ability to adapt to new situations a critical skill. Businesses must meet the evolving needs of their customers, suppliers and employees to survive. Interpersonal effectiveness — people as problem-solvers — is at the heart of organizational success.

"The new workplace requires a slight inversion of the Golden Rule: Treat others not as you would like to be treated, but as they would like to be treated."

Improving Relationships: Gain Approval to Increase Effectiveness

To create constructive relationships, we must gain approval and acceptance from our colleagues and customers. At the most fundamental level, we gain approval and acceptance for our behavior when what we do and what we say do not contradict each other. Relaying consistent, appropriate behavioral messages to others increases their trust in us and facilitates their acceptance.

Research shows people consider the following four basic factors of a person's behavior to determine approval:

- **Image** — the visual we present to others.
Is that image appropriate?
Does it distract from or enhance what we have to say?
- **Presentation** — what others hear.
Do we speak clearly and with confidence?
Do we inspire a dialogue, or are we rushed or curt?
- **Competence** — what we say.
What does our conversation reveal about our level of knowledge?
Do we address the complexity of an issue, and are we able to discuss its strengths and weaknesses?
Do we demonstrate creativity in our thinking and draw accurate conclusions?
- **Feedback** — how we react.
Do we invite discussion and have the ability to accept and give honest, respectful feedback?

Different individuals will place more value on different factors, so it is important to balance all four in our interactions.

Every interaction is dynamic. Conversations that start out well can suddenly turn sour. Dreaded confrontations may unexpectedly yield positive results. In any interaction, our impressions are in flux as it evolves. Behaviors that gained acceptance early on may change as the interaction develops; we must continuously adjust our responses so that we keep the interaction focused.

Managing Tension: A Delicate Balance

Tension is a loaded word; the connotation is typically negative. But tension itself is simply a state of disequilibrium; it is not inherently good or bad. It is an awareness that something disturbing is happening in our environment, and therefore a stimulus that causes us to act in response to a need. Let's take a closer look.

At a controlled level, tension fosters productivity. It motivates us to get out of bed, helps us complete our tasks, prompts us to take action to restore equilibrium. Where there's an absence of tension, there's a concurrent lack of motivation and productivity drops. Too much tension, on the other hand, typically causes people to become irritated and critical, or to remove themselves from the situation entirely. Relationships suffer and goals are not reached.

It's hard to overstate the turmoil that unmanaged tension can cause to a business. When it results in stalemates or talented people leaving the company, it hurts more than morale. Consider the costs involved in recruiting, hiring, and training, and you'll see that it also bruises the bottom-line.

Most conflict results from unmanaged tension, so the ability to relieve tension is critical to effective relationships. Gaining approval or acceptance from others hinges on the ability to anticipate their tension and focus on minimizing it. By doing this, you are meeting their needs, resulting in a positive relationship and the reinforcement of your behavior.

"I have always felt that a person who cannot mix with people of different temperaments is rather a useless person...talents should be sought far and wide."

SOICHIRO HONDA

Adapting to Change

Applying these principles to corporate changes will help foster a culture of acceptance rather than resistance. Let's look at some specific examples of conflict that can arise when a company undergoes change. We'll discuss the most appropriate way to relieve each employee's tension based on their unique behaviors.

- **Kate tells her co-worker: "I'd be more willing to accept this change if I understood the reasons driving it. But so far, no one has provided any evidence. How am I supposed to embrace the merits of that?"** Good point. Kate is clearly the kind of employee who needs to be empowered with information. Share your reports with her; invite her feedback. Develop opportunities to communicate the benefits of the change. Focus those benefits on how they can help her be more effective.
- **David calls his wife at lunch: "I can't believe they didn't ask my opinion. Who do they think still has to function in this brave new corporate world? I've still got performance goals to meet - you'd think they would have at least wanted some input. Maybe there's more than one solution."** David feels ambushed by this change because he's not been given the opportunity to become invested in it. His need for control has not been met. If you let him get involved in the process of change as much as possible, he will be more apt to accept it.
- **Sandy has just been told that her job description has been cut by one third. Now, sitting in the lunchroom, she barely touches her sandwich. She takes two aspirin, sighs, and borrows a newspaper to read through the classifieds.** How should change have been positioned for Sandy? Because her personal security has been threatened, without reassurance that her position is still viable, she'll assume the worst. Help employees like Sandy manage change by stressing what will stay the same and letting them know that they still have a valuable role to play. Don't sugar coat the truth - just be honest and compassionate.

Vision Begins With Today

When trying to decide on a strategy to present change to others, it's important not to let your feelings and values get in the way of your observations. You don't necessarily have to like someone to work with them. You just have to manage your differences so that tasks can be accomplished. Ask questions, elicit feedback and keep observing. Be open to what you see, and set aside what you think you know until you confirm it. Change is inevitable, but with the right tools we can foster acceptance rather than resistance.

No matter where we begin, it is possible to rewrite tomorrow's headlines. It is possible to get along and to encourage each other to remain open and alive to the possibility of change, which is, after all, still the only constant. The rewards of vision have always gone to those who take the initiative and, in so doing, manifest their own future. That ability is equally available to each of us willing to undertake the rewarding work of strengthening our interpersonal relationships by successfully managing behavioral differences. In these relationships we will find all the means and talent necessary to reshape our businesses so that the future can indeed fulfill its bright promise.



8878 S Barrons Blvd
Highlands Ranch, CO 80129
www.tracomcorp.com
800-221-2321

The SOCIAL STYLE MODEL and TRACOM are trademarks of The TRACOM Corporation.

Copyright 2004 The TRACOM Corporation