



PROFESSIONALISM AND PRODUCTIVITY

I went into a local gas station recently to pay my fuel bill. Behind the counter was a woman that was dressed in a very casual outfit, as one would wear to work in the garden. In front of me was a teenager, holding a bag, conversing loudly with the desk clerk. I waited a few minutes for my turn and tried not to listen to their conversation. I overheard, of course, because we were the only three people in the store.

Here's what I learned in the space of a few minutes: The teen that I originally thought was a customer was an employee. The woman behind the counter was disgruntled about another employee, and she and the teen were busy discussing the third staff member's negative attitude. They only became aware of me after they agreed that they were the best two employees in the business.

The clerk barely looked at me while I told her which pump I'd used, paid and received my change. Before I turned away they had already restarted phase two of the conversation, now focused on how they disliked working at the gas station. I left with a poor impression of my experience as an irrelevant customer who interrupted their conversation.

The next day I called a cabinet installation company on behalf of a client; everything they had done was sloppy, late or wrong. I was hoping to expedite completion of a few still incorrect parts of the project because she was simply out of patience with them.

My call was answered with a curt, "What is it?" After I politely explained who I was, the project manager apologized. "I'm so sorry; I thought you were our receptionist." I immediately understood why the project turned out the way it did. And they refused to correct their errors because they felt the distance back to the job site was too far for them to travel to finish the job details correctly. It would cost them too much money!

In the spirit of fairness, I don't know why the people involved acted the way they did. Were they dealing with impossible workloads? Were they simply having a rough day? Did I happen, by chance, to meet three irritable and negative people in a very short time? Or was it mismanagement that contributed to their attitudes? Supervisors and owners are in place not only for their ability to guide business details, but to serve the people that are also necessary in that journey—vendors, staff and ultimately, the customer. Everyone has a role to play well.

What does this have to do with workplace productivity? Everything!

People can't produce well in a negatively charged situation. Beyond where to stash the paper information and how to manage our time is the larger question of deciding what kind of workplace environment we want and how to maintain it.

As much as we'd like to think otherwise, the only area we really have control over is ourselves. But we do influence others as the result of what we choose to control in ourselves. We can choose to change the strategies we use to release frustrations from negatives to positives, and work toward fixing what isn't working well.

Each of the three people described above had a choice to change the tone of their conversation and voice, and where to place their attention.

Why bother? What's in it for us to choose to be attentive to customers or to guard against an impatient tone of voice with a co-worker? Deciding to suppress our personal irritations and instead concentrate on the job at hand benefits customers, our associates, and ourselves.

We benefit the most personally because keeping our attention on customer service and positive workplace interactions distracts us from our own troubles and moods. During a complaint session we may feel better about ourselves in the immediate, but ultimately it diminishes us as a community, which then makes us feel worse. We're also better able to strategize around what we can fix and what we cannot when we look at the issues from an objective standpoint. It's impossible to see view from the top of the mountain when we won't climb out of the valley.

Had these people acted differently I would have regarded them and their businesses positively. They would have modeled a kinder and more professional attitude for their associates, which turn a downward spiral of negativity into an upward trend.

As individuals we can choose to set the tone for the workplace. We can quietly model in our own speech and actions positive regard for our associates, raise our own bar for customer service standards, and ask how we can assist others with their difficulties without sloshing around in emotional muck with them, by offering training, guidelines and other support. Ultimately everyone benefits.

Mastery Consulting focuses on helping people excel and companies succeed through coaching, consulting and presentations. Areas addressed include effective productivity and information management skills, improved leadership and communication abilities, all of which help clients to get more out of life personally and professionally.

Published, quoted or featured in many local and national publications, principal Leslie Robison has presented organizational and personal achievement topics to businesses, chambers of commerce and community groups.

A member of a member of the National Association of Professional Organizers since 1999, she has served on NAPO's Philadelphia chapter board as Professional Development Director. She also served on the board of the National Study Group on Chronic Disorganization (NSGCD).

Recognized through the NSGCD as a Certified Professional Organizer in Chronic Disorganization, Leslie has authored resource materials and presents teleclasses to both her peers, clients and the public. She is a member of Vistage, CHADD, ADDA, the Indian Valley Chamber of Commerce and Rotary.

With Leslie's help I've been able to really make some genuine changes in my life and career, things I've been thinking about, hoping to do something about and yet every year I was no closer to realizing. ~R. G.

Your presentation was interesting, helpful and fun and thanks to you I've found myself trying different methods to get organized. ~B. W.

Clients include individuals, small businesses, and corporate personnel.

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