Assume Best Intent
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Assuming best intent is a simple concept that can save a lot of grief and acrimony in any organization. Human beings have a curious way of jumping to conclusions when something done by another person does not track with expectations. We jump to assign blame and think of all the evil things that might be behind the action. In doing so, we fail to take into account a myriad of alternate scenarios that might explain the paradox as being something more benign. We have all experienced this phenomenon, and there is a simple antidote. Assume the best intent rather than the worst.

A place to view this phenomenon most easily is in e-mail communication. One person will dash off a note and leave out a critical part of the background for an action. The person reading the note will say to himself, "Ed is clueless. He obviously is out to try to embarrass me with these statements. I don't care if he is having a bad day or not, he has no business making these statements without getting his facts straight." So, what started out as an innocent note from Ed, turns into the fuel for an e-grenade battle. The response coming back to Ed assumes the worst intent, so it is far off base in Ed's mind. Ed writes back a blistering note, and we are off to the races.

Several days later, after numerous notes and escalating distribution lists some manager steps in and asks these two feuding juveniles to stop the food fight. All of this acrimony and conflict could have been avoided if the recipient of Ed's first note assumed the best intent rather than the worst.

He would have gone over to Ed's desk and said, "Your note was confusing to me. I am not sure I follow how you concluded there was no information coming out of my group."   Then Ed could have explained how that was not his message at all, the words just did not convey what he was trying to say. This gives Ed the chance to write a simple note of apology and clarification, which he is happy to do because he was approached in an adult manner.

This technique is helpful for all forms of communication, not just the online environment. If we teach people to assume the best intent whenever there is a disconnect, it prevents people from going off on each other inappropriately. This creates a significant reduction in conflict, and since conflict often gets amplified in the pressure cooker of the work environment, this little remedy can save a lot of hurtful turmoil.

The preceding information was adapted from the book The TRUST Factor: Advanced Leadership for Professionals, by Robert Whipple. It is available on **www.leadergrow.com**.

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