

I'm OK – You're not OK

By Robert Whipple: MBA, CPLP

I have made an observation after listening to people vent about problem individuals at work or at home. It seems most people have a rather long list of things that other individuals must do to improve but a rather short list of things they need to change in their own behavior. I guess it is human nature to excuse or rationalize one's own shortcomings while focusing on the obvious improvement needs of others. Since nearly everyone practices this little deception, the world must be rife with almost perfect people who wish the other people around them would shape up. Hmmm – something is wrong with this picture? Here are a dozen tips that can change the pattern for you. Print them out and post them at work. Feel free to add more concepts of your own.

Tip #1 – Reverse the Roles.

The other day a student was venting about a particular individual who was a major challenge at work. The student described in gory detail several behavioral things the other person constantly did that drove him up the wall. I asked him to write an analysis about himself from the perspective of that other person. In other words, what would the other person tell me about him if he had the chance. That brought the student up short, and he admitted it would be a rather humbling exercise to do.

Tip #2 – Don't Sweat the Small Stuff.

It is a well known fact that most married couples fight over the little things that become habitual annoyances on a daily basis. The position of the toilet seat is a great example. How come I can never get my wife to leave the toilet seat up? It is not the 401K account that most couples argue about daily, it is who gets the remote control, or why the toothpaste tube is always topleless. So, if we can just remember that the small stuff is really just that, then maybe we can relax a bit.

Tip #3 – Live and let Live.

If a cubicle mate hums when she is happy, it is no reason to have a coronary over it. This is her outlet and way to be cheerful. Even though it curdles your skin when it goes on and on, why burst her balloon by pointing out her "problem"? If it is an unconscious habit, she will never be able to control it anyway. Simply buy a pair of noise canceling head phones and play the kind of music you like. Let a happy person be happy or a miserable person be miserable. Focus your energy on creating your own sphere of cheerfulness rather than trying to change the rest of the world.

Tip #4 – Punch Out Early, Don't Punch Out the Person

Find some way to get away from the petty squabbles before they bring you to the snapping point. If you cannot actually leave without penalty, it does not stop you from mentally checking out. Just go for a little vacation in your mind. Actually imagine smelling the giant pines if you love to hike. Feel the frost on your cheeks if you like to ski. Taste the chocolate chip cookie if you like to eat, or how about a relaxing hot tub while sitting at your desk? Imagining happier places has kept many POWs alive for years; the same technique can keep you sane until 5 o'clock.

Tip #5 - Share a treat

Just because someone drives you nuts by clipping his nails in the morning is no reason to hate him all day long. Find some symbolic olive branch and waive it around. Go get two chocolate bars and give him one. Bring him in a bag of his favorite flavor of coffee. By extending kindness, we get kindness in return. Usually people know what they do that drives us crazy. If we change our body language rather than keep festering about “their problem” and learn to accentuate the positive, then the other person will likely respond in kind.

Tip #6 - Extend Trust

The reciprocal nature of trust says that you can improve another person’s trust in you by extending more trust to him or her. When we build up a higher account balance of trust, the petty issues seem to melt away because we are focused on what is good about the other person rather than idiosyncrasies that drive us bonkers. The best way to increase trust is to reinforce people who are candid with us about our own shortcomings. That takes emotional intelligence to do, but it works wonders at improving relationships.

Tip #7 - Don’t Complain About Others Behind their Back

Speak well of other people as much as possible. The old adage “if you cannot say something nice about someone don't say anything” is really good advice. When we gripe about others when they are not present, a little of the venom always leaks out to the other person, either directly or indirectly. Never make a joke about another person at his or her expense. I wise old pastor taught me that rule 40 years ago, and it is a great rule. If a person is doing something that really bothers you, simply tell him or her in as kind a way as possible why you find the action irritating.

Tip #8 – Stop Acting Like Children

The lengths people go to in order to strike back at others for annoying them often takes on the air of a food fight in grade school. Escalating e-mail notes is a great example of this phenomenon. I call them e-grenade battles. It is easy to avoid these squabbles if we simply do not take the bait. When you find yourself going back and forth with another person more than three times, it is time to change the mode of communication. Pick up the phone or walk down the hall for a chat.

Tip #9 – Care About the Other Person

If we really do care enough to not get bent out of shape over little things, then we can tolerate inconveniences a lot better. What we get back from others is really a reflection of the vibes we put out ourselves. If we are feeling prickly and negative reactions from others, we need to check our attitude toward them. While it is convenient to blame them, often we are the cause of the negativity: they are simply a mirror.

Tip #10 – Picture the other person as the most important person in your life

If all else fails, try to remember that life is short and to expend energy bickering and griping about others really wastes your most precious resource – your time. How much better it is to go through life laughing and loving than griping and hating. We do have a choice when it comes to the attitudes we show other people. Make sure your choice enriches others as well as yourself.

Tip#11 - Have your own personal development plan

Start out each day with a few minutes of meditation on how you want to present yourself better to your co-workers. Have a list of areas you are trying to improve on. This mindset crowds out some of the rotten attitudes that can lead you to undermine other's actions all day. Create a list of your personal improvement areas and work on them daily.

Tip #12 - Follow the Golden Rule

Finally, the famous Golden Rule is the most positive way to prevent petty issues from becoming relationship destroyers. By simply taking the time to figure out how you would like to be treated if the roles were reversed, you will usually make the right choice for building and preserving great relationships.

*The preceding information was adapted from the book **Leading with Trust is like Sailing Downwind**, by Robert Whipple. It is available on www.leadergrow.com.*

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