

Diagnosing Workplace Illnesses: Infusing Your Organization's Culture with Positive Change

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A Medical Model Approach: Without a diagnosis, there's not much of a basis for an effective treatment plan. The same holds true with organizations that are not maximizing their energies. They may be suffering from an unhealthy culture. Or perhaps budget crunches have them running anorexic instead of just plain "lean and mean." Regardless of the current state of affairs within any organization, there is always room for improvement. And as long as we are human, the same applies to us as well.

Our work in the leadership industry focuses on what may be the saboteurs of optimal functioning when dealing with a multitude of personalities out there in the work place. If you aren't happy with your experience, it may be that you caught a "corporate virus." It is also important to consider that you may have had a dormant one that got activated by your work environment. Either way, it's time to get at the root of the problem, the disease. Only then will you be able to eradicate the symptoms of anger, burnout, boredom, emotional lethargy, or whatever it is that is holding you back from peak performance.

The focus of this article is the individual person. After all, it is the individual who contributes to a certain organizational culture. We all work with or have worked with a myriad of personalities from supportive colleagues to ego maniacs. Where does your personality fit within this continuum? Is it possible that your personality may be creating responses from others that you find less than desirable? It is your personality that creates your delivery system, and if the people with whom you work don't like your delivery system, they won't be willing to follow your lead. Some may even sabotage your sincere efforts. The other notion is that nobody can have an interaction with you without having an experience of himself or herself in your presence. And if they don't like that experience, they are not going to support your projects, nor will they support your state of wellbeing.

In order to move forward in a positive direction, it is helpful to know something about how you

arrived at your current state of affairs. An etiology of your delivery system (personality) can be helpful material from which to work, especially if you are a "leopard looking to change some spots."

Looking for an Etiology? Then First and Foremost, Appreciate that Everyone Has a Story. Each of us has a story, and just as the practitioner goes about creating a history for his or her client (that's right, it's better not to regard your customers as patients), we in the leadership industry also take a look at history for clues to support the presenting problem. We want to know our client's story.

What past experiences shaped and influenced them? Some have happy stories, some very sad ones. And while it is not necessary to have specific memories of what shaped us, it is important to accept that we are the sum total of all our past experiences, many of which remain in our subconscious and are negative and self-defeating. They represent the aforementioned saboteurs to optimal functioning. Just as people who are unaware of their heart disease are jeopardized by their ignorance, the same is true within the psychological realm. That is why what you don't know can and in fact, does hurt you.

This is not about good or bad childhoods or good or bad parents. This is all about our perceptions of our story, our life events, and our interpretation of our environment and how we fit in it. Think about it – we were all babies at one time. Because our parents could not always be immediate in their response to our cries, without a vocabulary, we infants began developing ideas of how loveable we are, and how nurturing our world is. We then grow up responding socially in a way that is in alignment with this template of self and others. Our interactions with others then start to become routine, automatic. And as a result, we now get to travel through life *unaware*. We say, "This is me; take it or leave it," which may help explain the divorce rate or corporate-initiated attrition rate. Of course, the effects of *unawareness* may be less drastic; we

may simply feel tired, disengaged, frustrated, empty, or you name it.

Diagnosing Illnesses Born of Unawareness:

What signs might you look for that could suggest some unresolved issues that awareness would have precluded? (Of course, the problem with this exercise is that one can only answer from his or her conscious awareness.) But here they are:

- Needing to overcompensate, which ends up defeating our purpose
- Blocking our lovingness
- Not being open to even benign relationships
- Feeling disconnected from others
- Feeling superior to others
- Feeling inferior to others
- Feeling misunderstood and/or unlikable
- Yearning to get back to the basics of who we really are, and
- Entering relationships that don't work.

Antecedents to these negative feelings and experiences reside in both our conscious awareness and in our subconscious. If we have past hurts we've never talked about or shared, it is a form of hiding that sends a message to the subconscious that something is wrong with us. Think of it as a virus in one's bio-computer (the mind). And psychological mental viruses are tricky. They can infiltrate other programs or drives, like our emotions. Of course, this can work both ways. Faulty emotions can inflict an otherwise healthy mind. And while we're being holistic, think of the devastating effects on the body.

The real culprit of all human distress is our belief in the message in our subconscious that something is wrong with us, that we may be unworthy, unlovable, not good enough or some such thing. We call this our negative ground of being – NGOB. These negative grounds are lies we bought into at an earlier age, but because they exist in the subconscious, they continue to play out in often times devastating ways. Simply stated, when we allow another person to trigger upset within us, their behavior has activated our negative ground of being, and we become defensive resorting to a compensatory behavior to prove that it is not so. It is our defending against this lie that gets us in trouble. And what we resist persists. If it were not an issue for us, there wouldn't be anything to defend against.

So what's the treatment plan?

Stop defending yourself against negative feedback. Instead, move your energy into the fear source. Ask, "How so?" Say, "Tell me more." That releases negative emotion from the dialogue and negative energy from the negative ground, and you can start hearing without fear or anger, the latter of which is almost always a cover-up emotion for fear.

Most people would like to know if they have a broken bone so that they can receive proper treatment, yet too few people are willing to know where their psychological viruses are housed, of which almost all of are fear-based. And if it is not a realistic fear such as a Bengal tiger standing at your front door, then it is a neurotic fear, which serves only to hold you back.

Another thing you can do to reduce this negative energy from the subconscious is start paying attention to your resistances, which include anger, boredom, inappropriate fatigue, getting headaches, sudden urge to urinate, and inappropriate laughter, to name only a few. They prevent you from getting at the truth of how you're holding yourself back.

Although some of these may seem a bit far-fetched, I have watched hundreds of people go through self-awareness workshops discovering their headaches were serving only as a distraction from hearing the topic of their truth at hand. As soon as we change the subject, the headache goes away, and the person begins listening to something of inconsequential value.

The cure? You are the cure. To quote Harvard Business Review's December 2001 issue, "**Leadership's first commandment is 'Know thyself.'**" You are the instrument of your leadership. You are also the instrument of your love ship. Mind, body, and emotions – put them all together, and you have a personality, which determines your likeability and success in this world. Discover at the MGMA summer conference fascinating ways to utilize these channels to optimal living, leading, and loving. And just as the noted work of Larry Dossey, MD takes the medical field into the unprecedented arena of spirituality and healing, you will also learn how to reconnect with this your fourth and primary channel, which is that deeper being within you that represents who you really are.

So if you and everyone else in your workplace were to travel a path of self-awareness, your discoveries would begin this process of infusing positivism into your organization's culture. Just make sure you like their retirement plan.

Dr. Holly Latty-Mann is President of The Leadership Trust, and **Teresa Spangler** is CEO of Creative Leadership Adventures, LLC and are writing their first book on leading, living, and loving through a four-channel optimization process. They partner in the Triangle area of NC to deliver a full range of leadership/creativity workshops and on-site consulting activities designed to fuel organizational productivity and profitability. For more information, www.leadership-trust.org and www.cladventures.com.