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EMPLOYMENT TIMES

MAKING OPPORTUNITIES KNOCK ON YOUR DOOR

Reaching your full potential: Overcoming fear

Each of us has untapped potential. When this potential is embraced and used, it can have a powerful impact on our lives.

Think about a 2%, 5%, 10% shift in how we are living our lives at home, school, work and play. Small shifts and changes can powerfully impact our lives. But what gets in our way? What obstacles must we overcome? One obstacle for people is fear, and fear can be limiting at best and paralyzing at worst.

My family and I went camping over the spring break holidays. We camped at a beautiful State Park -- Falls Creek Falls -- in Tennessee. It is a wonderful place to visit and explore with breathtaking views, hiking trails, and waterfalls.

Some of the hiking trails have suspension bridges connecting the trails over vast gorges, some bridges being more than 100 ft. high. Like the one in the Indiana Jones movie. As my wife, two boys and I approached a very long bridge suspended at least 100 ft. high, my oldest son quickly took off across the bridge and yelled for the rest of us to join him.

As I approached the bridge, while he was crossing, I yelled out to him

the typical parent concerns -- Be careful! Hang onto the rail! Walk slow! If the bridge breaks... What was I thinking? What was I feeling?

I became acutely aware of an enormous amount of fear for him, and fear in me while I was crossing this high bridge. When he got to the other side, he turned, waved and yelled, "Come On Dad!" I walked slowly across the bridge noticing an

incredible amount of fear and run-away thinking happening with me, which had me considering not going forward. My son was on the other side and I had a choice, to let the fear stop me or not.

As I walked across the bridge the fear increased profoundly inside of me until I got to the other side. Once I was over the bridge, my son and I high-fived and walked back across the bridge. As we walked back across I experienced no fear. What happened to the fear?

That experience highlighted this point to me. That there are times in our lives when we want to do something -- but fear can creep up inside of us and we become unsure of ourselves. Unsure if we can achieve -- "getting to the other side". Most of the fear that stops us from achieving what we want or need to do to improve our lives, is nothing more than self-limiting beliefs.

If we will just take the risk, take the appropriate steps and embrace our fear(s) we can meet our goals. sideroad.com



Motivation and solving office conflicts

THE CONSCIENTIOUS and well-meaning owner of a small business cannot seem to get his work force motivated, despite a good benefits package and pleasant working environment. "I am coming to the conclusion that it doesn't pay to be nice to people," he says. "Maybe if I fired a few of them I'd get better results."

The supervisor of a 100-employee division of a large company says his employees are demoralized; he wants to know ways to increase their motivation.

An office manager is stunned to find out that two of her best employees told another supervisor she did not like them. "They are both top performers, and I can never remember being dissatisfied with them in any way," she says. "What's happening?"

These managers are discovering that managing means managing people. In the course of consulting and column writing I have found the two major problem areas for managers are how to motivate and how to reduce conflict.

Take the owner who is contemplating firing some of his employees. It is not that he is doing something wrong by giving them a handsome benefits package and good working conditions. He is just not doing enough. If you are in his situation you should ask yourself these questions: Do your employees participate in decision making? Do they have promotion opportunities? Do they think you have made promises you have not fulfilled? Do you reward them for initiative and superior performance?



People will work for money, but except in extreme circumstances, they resist working for money alone. They also want recognition, security and opportunity. There is, accordingly, a simple solution for the supervisor of those 100 demoralized employees: Tell them "thank you."

It is human nature to like praise and to be motivated to work for it. I often tell my clients, "Do you want to make \$1,000 in five minutes? Go and give an employe a word of praise. His work rate will increase, his motivational level will rise, and he will pass along his good mood to others."

And you must be aware that all the good work and good feeling you build up can be destroyed in ways you little expect. Take the supervisor who was amazed to find out that her two best employes thought she disliked them.

It can happen like this: The manager is worried about a procurement prob-

lem. Frank, the employe, passes the manager in the corridor and greets her with a smile. The manager, engrossed in her problem, looks up briefly and mumbles a reply. Frank's mood drops. He wonders why she is angry with him, what he did, whether he is doing a good job.

The next day, the procurement problem takes a turn for the worse. Frank tries again. This time the manager does not even respond. Frank's worst fears are confirmed. And the manager does not even realize it.

Why does this happen? Employees are constantly gauging their job security and their employer's satisfaction with their performance by the expression they see on the manager's face.

OFFICE CONFLICT at its worst is caused by a deliberate troublemaker. Here is a typical case:

"I work with a manager who constantly criticizes me and the other man-

agers. He likes to show my boss how knowledgeable he is and how he is the only guy who can 'get anything done around here.' The boss laps it up, and the two of them have lengthy conferences discussing all the employes. This guy is bent on climbing to the top over our bodies. What should we do?"

These professional conflict makers create morale problems, credibility problems and eventual productivity problems. They can be cunning and vicious, but they flourish only where the boss is a willing participant.

Professional conflict makers devote so much of their energies to criticizing others' performances that their own tasks are neglected. You can find subtle ways of pointing that out to their superiors.

Worth noting is that professional conflict makers rarely confine their volleys to employees. Their highly critical appraisals usually include disparaging remarks about the boss and his management style. At the appropriate time, you might wish to share with your boss your concerns about the damage being done to the boss' own image in the eyes of the employes. By the way, bring along a witness or two. It will enhance your credibility. Keep your remarks dispassionate, and your boss will see the light.

A high level of employe motivation can make a company grow and flourish. Human conflict can reduce productivity and increase turnover. Business owners would be well advised to regularly monitor both. For a business they can spell life or death. - findarticles.com

Staying cool and confident under pressure

"So, Susan, your report indicates you support forging ahead with the expansion but have you considered the impact this will have on our customers? Surely you remember the fiasco in Dallas last year when they tried the same type of project?"

Yikes! If you're Susan, you're likely feeling under pressure! You have to answer the question and allay the CEO's concerns about the disruption to customers. What do you do? What do you say? How do you say it? What if you can't think of anything to say?

This is not an uncommon situation. Whether you are put on the spot while attending a meeting, presenting a proposal, selling an idea, or answering questions after a presentation, articulating your thoughts in unanticipated situations is a skill. Thinking on your feet is highly coveted skill and when you master it, your clever and astute responses will instill immediate confidence in what you are saying.

When you can translate your thoughts and ideas into coherent speech quickly you ensure your ideas are heard. You also come across as being confident, persuasive, and trustworthy.

Confidence is key when learning to think on your feet. When you present information, give an opinion or provide suggestions, make sure you know what you are talking about and that you are well informed. This doesn't mean you have to know everything about everything, but if you are reasonably confident in your knowledge of the subject, that confidence will help you to remain calm and collected even if you are put unexpectedly in the hot seat.

The secret of thinking on your feet is to be prepared: learn some skills and tactics, and do some preparation for situations that might put you under pressure. Then when you do find yourself faced with unexpected questions and debate, you'll be ready to draw on these tactics and preparation, and so stay poised while you compose your thoughts and prepare your response. Here are some tips and tactics:

1. Relax

This is often the opposite of how you are feeling when you're under pressure, but in order for your voice to remain calm and for your brain to "think", you have to be as relaxed as possible.

Take deep breaths

Take a second and give yourself a positive and affirming message

Clench invisible muscles (thighs, biceps, feet) for a few seconds and release.

2. Listen

It comes as no surprise that listening is critical to thinking on your feet. Why do you need to listen? To make sure you fully understand the question or request before you reply. If you answer too soon, you risk going into a line of thinking that is unnecessary or inappropriate. To help you with your listening remember to:

Look directly at the questioner
Observe body language as well as what is being spoken

Try to interpret what is being suggested by the question or request. Is this an attack, a legitimate request for more information, or a test? Why is this person asking this and what is the intention?

Tip:
Remember that the person is asking a question because he or she is interested. Some interest is positive - they simply want to know more - and some is negative - they want to see you squirm. Either way they are interested in what you have to say. It's your privilege and pleasure not to disappoint them!

3. Have the Question Repeated

If you're feeling particularly under pressure, ask for the question to be repeated. This gives you a bit more time to think about your response.

At first glance people think this will only make them look unsure. It doesn't. It makes you look concerned that you give an appropriate response. It also gives the questioner an opportunity to rephrase and ask a question that is more on point. Remember, the questioner may well have just "thought on his or her feet" to ask the question, so when you give them a second chance, the question may well be better articulated and clearer to all.

By asking to have the question repeated you also get another opportunity to assess the intentions of the questioner. If it is more specific or better worded, chances are the person really wants to learn more. If the repeated question is more aggressive than the first one, then you know the person is more interested in making



you uncomfortable than anything else. When that's the case, the next tip comes in very handy.

4. Use Stall Tactics

Sometimes you need more time to get your thoughts straight and calm yourself down enough to make a clear reply. The last thing you want to do is blurt out the first thing that comes to your mind. Often this is a defensive comment that only makes you look insecure and anxious rather than confident and composed.

Repeat the question yourself. This gives you time to think and you clarify exactly what is being asked. It also allows you to rephrase if necessary and put a positive spin on the request. "How have I considered the impact on customers in order to make sure they have a continued positive experience during the expansion?"

Narrow the focus. Here, you ask a question of your own to not only clarify, but to bring the question down to a manageable scope. "You're interested in hearing how I've considered customer impacts. What impacts are you most interested in: product availability or in-store service?"

Ask for clarification. Again, this will force the questioner to be more specific and hopefully get more to a specific point. "When you say you want to know how I've analyzed customer impacts, do you mean you want a detailed analysis or a list of the tools and methods I used?"

Ask for a definition. Jargon and specific terminology may present a problem for you. Ask to have words and ideas clarified to ensure you are talking about the same thing.

5. Use Silence to your Advantage

We are conditioned to believe that silence is uncomfortable. However, if you use it sparingly, it communicates that you are in control of your thoughts and confident in your ability to answer expertly. When you rush to answer you also typically rush your words. Pausing to collect your thoughts tells your brain to slow everything down.

6. Stick to One Point and One Supporting Piece of Information

There's a high risk that, under pressure, you'll answer a question with either too much or too little information. If you give too short an answer, you risk letting the conversation slip into interrogation mode. (You'll get another question, and the questioner will be firmly in control of how the dialogue unfolds). When your reply is too long, you risk losing people's interest, coming across as boring, or giving away things that are better left unsaid. Remember, you aren't being asked to give a speech on the subject. The questioner wants to know something. Respect that and give them an answer, with just enough supporting information.

This technique gives you focus.

Rather than trying to tie together all the ideas that are running through your head, when you pick one main point and one supporting fact, you allow yourself to answer accurately and assuredly.

Tip:

If you don't know the answer, say so. There is no point trying to make something up. You will end up looking foolish and this will lower your confidence when you need to think on your feet in the future. There is (usually) nothing wrong with not knowing something. Simply make sure you follow up as soon as possible afterwards with a researched answer.

7. Prepare some "what ifs"

With a bit of forethought, it's often possible to predict the types of questions you might be asked, so you can prepare and rehearse some answers to questions that might come your way. Let's say you are presenting the monthly sales figures to your management team. The chances are your report will cover most of the obvious questions that the management team might have, but what other questions might you predict? What's different about this month? What new questions might be asked? How would you respond? What additional information might you need to have to hand to support more detailed questions?

In particular, spend some time brainstorming the most difficult questions that people might ask, and preparing and rehearsing good answers to them.

8. Practice Clear Delivery

How you say something is almost as important as what you say. If you mumble or use "umm" or "ah" between every second word, confidence in what you are saying plummets. Whenever you are speaking with people, make a point to practice these key oration skills:

Speak in a strong voice. (Don't confuse strong with loud!)

Use pauses strategically to emphasize a point or slow yourself down

Vary your tone and pay attention to how your message will be perceived given the intonation you use

Use eye contact appropriately

Pay attention to your grammar

Use the level of formality that is appropriate to the situation.

9. Summarize and Stop

Wrap up your response with a quick summary statement. After that, resist adding more information. There may well be silence after your summary. Don't make the common mistake of filling the silence with more information! This is the time when other people are absorbing the information you have given. If you persist with more information, you may end up causing confusion and undoing the great work you've already done in delivering your response.

Use words to indicate you are summarizing (i.e. "in conclusion," "finally") or briefly restate the question and your answer. So - what did I do to analyze customer impacts? I reviewed the Dallas case files in detail, and prepared a "What if" analysis for our own situation."

Key points:

No one enjoys being putting on the spot or answering questions that you aren't fully expecting. The uncertainty can be stressful. That stress doesn't need to be unmanageable and you can think on your feet if you remember the strategies we just discussed. Essentially, thinking on your feet means staying in control of the situation. Ask questions, buy time for yourself, and remember to stick to one point and make that one point count. When you are able to zoom in on the key areas of concern, you'll answer like an expert and you impress your audience, and yourself, with your confidence and poise.

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