



Sand Paper

Winter 2016



Happy New Year! Have you noticed our new look? After 22 years in business and many positive changes, we felt it was time to update our look, our name, and our logo to better reflect our company that constantly grows, and adapts to meet the ever-changing needs of today's

workplace, our customers, and clients.

We put concise words to our mission and values and embrace them in our day to day work. Sand Creek is dedicated to "providing helpful solutions to improve productivity and shining light into the darkest moments". We are a resource to help you and your family when times get tough. We exemplify these core values: "Wisdom, Compassion, Trust, Hope and Service." It has been, and will always be, an honor to help you, your family or your organization through challenging times.

I am an artist, as well as, an employee assistance professional; I enjoy the powerful message in visual symbols. Please note the design elements of our new logo which includes a flame for illuminating and lighting the way to hope and new ideas, also the bud to represent the new growth that impacts people's lives through the use of our services.

Most people know Sand Creek for our employee assistance program (EAP) services that provide 24/7 help to employers, employees and their families through our face to face

counseling model throughout the country. But do you know that we serve over 640 separate employers, and cover over 400,000 lives around the world including employees and their families as far away as Japan and China?

In this edition of the Sand Paper, I would like to introduce you to a lesser known, but equally as impactful, side of our business that provides help and supportive solutions to organizations that we call our OAP, organizational assistance program. Sand Creek's OAP services offer help, at the organizational level, to leaders, organizations, work groups and their employees struggling with sticky and ongoing problems of low employee engagement, change management, conflict, civility and team effectiveness. Please read this edition written by our OAP team to learn much more about the ways we can be helpful in building healthier, productive workplaces.

On behalf of all the staff and consultants of Sand Creek, I wish you a happy, healthy ,and prosperous 2016. We are grateful for the opportunities to serve you, and look forward to providing helpful solutions to you should you require a shining light.

Warm wishes,

Dr. Gretchen M. Stein
President and CEO

Common Workplace Reactions During High Stress

By: Diane Johnson, MSW, LISW, CEAP

Many workplaces are feeling the wear and tear of reacting to sudden changes, losing employees, expanding the scope of work and living in a survival mode. As a result of staying in a mode of high stress and high pressure, there are common experiences that occur for work teams. Three systemic problems that may occur are:

1. Management focusing on productivity and external demands rather than employee performance or interpersonal dynamics. When this cycle occurs, it may help in the short-run to get through a crisis, but it is a pattern that doesn't sustain itself and lends itself to a perception of neglect by employees.

2. Leadership losing sight of a vision or clear goals. As a result of this, employees may perceive a lack of direction and there can be a disintegration of trust in management and an increase in conflict and turf battles.

3. Employees or a team see their welfare depending on an advantage over someone else, and it is based on a belief that there is a scarcity of opportunity or rewards. Whenever one side gets ahead, the other is threatened, leading to more aggressive behavior. This leads to defensive behaviors on both parts and there is a focus on "getting my piece of the pie" and "you can fend for yourself."

The reality is that these are normal responses to systems that have not been able to attend to the maintenance of their organization. Work teams are a lot like cars when it comes to keeping them running. We can push a car by skipping an oil change and it may still be fine, but if we continue to ignore essential services, we will pay a price with how the car is functioning.

Many teams and organization have stayed in the crisis mode and let go of the functions that keep them healthy. Staff meetings get skipped, poor performance gets accommodated rather than addressed, high achievers get asked to do more and feel less valued and the focus is to just get through the next day.

At this time, there is a need for many leadership teams to pause, take a collective breath and identify what it is that has been on the back-burner when it comes to the essential health of a workgroup. Meeting with staff, pausing to reflect on accomplishments in spite of adversity, re-focusing the goals for the next 3 months, giving employees feedback (both positive and negative) can go a long way toward re-engaging a work team.

It's sometimes hard to make these steps a priority but it is as necessary as remembering to put gas in the car if we want to get somewhere. If you have a leadership role and would like to talk further about what may be helpful with your team, please give the staff at Sand Creek a call.



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HOW TO INCREASE ORGANIZATIONAL PRODUCTIVITY

By: Carol Nagele-Vitalis, M.A., OAP Consultant

Question: How do we increase productivity in our own organization?

Answer: Improve team work and intentional communication.

Teams and work groups have the best of intentions. From my experience, individuals in the work place want to do good and meaningful work. So where does it all go wrong?

Most often there is not one specific event that triggers the dysfunction in the team but rather a series of “unfortunate miscommunications” happening over time. The repeated misfiring of messages between team members creates confusion and misunderstanding and at that point most people start to avoid those that have made them uncomfortable in hopes “it will smooth itself out.” The avoidance only adds to the confusion. Team members don’t understand what they said wrong and feelings get hurt.

As this tangled web of miscommunication develops, trust starts to leak out of the team and conversations are held on the sidelines, outside of the team meetings. These sideline conversations are based more on assumptions than fact. Eventually the break down creates enough pain that it demands attention. This is where I most often enter the picture.

Investing the time, energy and money it takes to improve team trust is work that pays off in greater productivity and employee satisfaction.

A useful team communication tool is the Ladder of Inference. The basic premise of the tool is to help explain how, when “faced with a situation,” tend to jump to conclusions.

The Ladder of Inference was first put forward by organizational psychologist Chris Argyris and describes the thinking process we all go through, usually without realizing it, to get from a fact to a decision or action. If you ask a team member why they behaved in a particular way when faced with a given situation, they will likely say it seemed instinctive or obvious to them. The Ladder of Inference breaks down how we all rely on our data bank of experience in our heads, we then filter that data, add meaning to it, make assumptions, conclusions, and act.

Our conclusions may seem so obvious, clear and valuable to us, however, unfortunately not so much to others. The internal mental process is invisible to our colleagues and, by the way, they have their own different data bank of experiences and information. By helping team members slow down, descend the ladder and try to understand their own viewpoints and assumptions as well as others, a new level of communication is reached. Since this process happens every time we interact with someone, teaching employees this tool and helping them practice using it returns the investment made and improves the skill and will of teammates resulting in a more productive and engaged team.

To learn more about how this tool and many others can be taught to your employees call us at Sand Creek. We’d be thrilled to help your team.

Chris Argyris. *Overcoming Organizational Defenses*, 1992

Being a Good Team Member

By: Carol Nagele-Vitalis, M.A., OAP Consultant

What does it take to be a good team member? Often we look at other team members and see all the difficult behavior in them and forget that we have an opportunity to make a difference simply with modeling the behavior we'd like to see in others. It may not be easy work, but it is worth the effort.

Here are some tips to take with you into your next team meeting:

1 Listen Well

It is easy in this fast moving high-tech world to actually check-out mentally during meetings and conversations. You may be sitting in the chair but where is your mind? Check yourself and make sure you stay in the room during meetings. Are you drifting off and making your grocery list? Have you stopped listening to start crafting your response?

2 Be Curious About Others Ideas

We all like our own ideas best and so it is often difficult to shift and explore another's. Remember to help others develop their ideas by being curious and asking questions. Stay curious!

3 Ask Good Questions

There is nothing more motivating to a team member than someone who has taken the time to listen and ask a question. Questions also display your listening skills. Understanding what is being discussed and doing the work to ask a thoughtful question will further the discussion, but also build a synergy on your team for creative problem solving.

4 Encourage Others

It feels good to hear the positive and frankly most of us are stingy with our words of encouragement. Perhaps you don't feel you need encouragement so you don't give it, the fact is other people do respond to encouragement so even if it is not your style, practice giving authentic encouragement and see what happens.

5 Be Grateful

Shifting our focus from "wanting" and "demanding" gives us an openness that allows good information flow and relationship building. Relationship building is essential to teams and having a lens of gratefulness for the work and each other brings a breath of fresh air into an often stressful and demanding work place.

6 Bring Your Ideas and Be Willing to Share Them

Don't hold back, being a good team member includes participating even if you don't express yourself perfectly. Your team members will forgive blunders as you share you are working on becoming a better team member. Be a student of good communication skills. There is always something to learn and practice related to communicating with others.

Oftentimes we look at a list like this and try to tackle all the points. Don't. I encourage you to pick one. This work is an ongoing process that ebbs and flows depending on how the team changes along with overall leadership so don't overwhelm yourself with shooting for perfection. Becoming a good team member is work that is continuous and ongoing, however, the more intentional you are about this work the easier it becomes to enjoy your fellow team mates and do good work.

HOW AN ORGANIZATION ASSISTANCE PROGRAM (OAP) CAN BENEFIT YOUR WORKGROUP

By: Dr. Susan Herreid, OAP Consultant

Workgroup challenges? Team conflict? Collaboration issues?

Every organization and business will struggle at some time or another with workgroup challenges, team conflict and/or collaboration issues.

Many times when organization assistance services are requested by a supervisor, human services director, or department head they have ideas about what issues have had an impact friction or challenges within a workgroup. While they may have identified certain aspects of the current challenge(s) playing out, there may be more at the root of the issue.

A Sand Creek OAP Consultant can provide value in the appropriate situations by identifying all of the issues playing out within a team or the workplace. The value of having a skilled neutral party provide an assessment is that they are often able to identify not only the current issues, but all contributing factors which may be at the root of a difficult workplace situation. A skilled consultant cannot only identify the primary issues playing out, but offer clear and definitive recommendations that can help those involved to address the challenges as well as determine strategies for moving forward in an effective manner.

A consultant can help work with the stakeholders and appropriate leadership to develop a well thought

out action plan. A creative plan includes several options, along with estimated timelines and expected outcomes. This can be instrumental in assisting and supporting a supervisor or management, as well as working with a group or team to effectively work through difficult issues and creating a plan for moving forward in a positive and proactive manner.

While each workplace issue is unique, it is important to consider how best to address the workplace circumstances in a manner that will ensure the best opportunity for a successful and productive outcome for your organization. The assessment process can be conducted in several ways. It may include individual interviews or depending on the number of staff, can be done in several small work groups.

Sand Creek's OAP Specialists can discuss your unique situation and determine the best approach for dealing with your current workgroup/team's workplace challenges. Some areas of focus are:

- Change Management
- Critical Incident Stress Management (CISM)
- Crisis Management
- Dispute Management
- Facilitated Group
- Leadership Development



Dear Sandy,

I have a coworker who is very negative and it's starting to affect our work team. The trouble is that this individual has worked for our company for many years and has a lot of good experience and knowledge related to our business, but her attitude is very toxic to the point where, eventually, when any new hires come on board, they end up being impacted by her tone and overall attitude towards colleagues and leadership. It's to the point where she's gathered a small group of others who seem to share her same viewpoints and have joined her in the negativity too. It's started to become an issue for the rest of us who only want to be able to work in a productive and positive work environment. Help!

Trying to Stay Positive!

DEAR POSITIVE,

This is a common occurrence in many workplaces. Negative attitudes create stress and drain energy; it's hard to be around for long periods of time. Negative people are usually individuals who harbor chronic personal or professional stressors that could be attributed to a great many things. Sometimes it can manifest due to a lack of control, need for control and/or desire for validation or inclusion.

My suggestions:

- Avoid spending any time around negative coworkers.
- If that is not an option, establish boundaries. Do not allow yourself to be drawn into toxic conversations. Tell the negative coworker you prefer to approach your job in a healthy, more positive manner. Avoid providing a sympathetic audience for the negativity.
- If all else fails, consider engaging a supervisor or someone in Human Resources about the struggles you are experiencing in dealing with the negative person. Your supervisor/HR may have ideas to address the negativity and it might open up discussion of deeper systemic issues that need to be identified and dealt with.
- Consult with Sand Creek. Any of our clinicians can directly assess the nature of the situation and determine whether or not there are opportunities and means by which to explore the issue with you to help with more specific and customized ways to help you cope.

Happy New Year! Stay Positive.



SEND YOUR QUESTIONS TO DEAR SANDY BY EMAILING US AT INFO@SANDCREEKEAP.COM.