

UP THE CREEK

DEC
2018

When a Policy is not Enough: Leaders Building a Respectful Workplace

by Carol Nagele-Vitalis, MA, OAP Consultant

Workplace climate matters. As a leader in an organization, building a culture that employees thrive in can often be a difficult part of the job. A respectful workplace is a place people want to work. Retention increases and absenteeism and turnover decrease.

Does respect mean the same thing to all employees? How do we foster a respectful environment?

Let's take these questions one at a time and try to make some headway on this important topic.

Does respect mean the same thing to all employees? The short answer is "no." When I think about respect, I describe it this way: respect can feel like the air we breathe; you don't realize it's there until it's gone. From where most people sit, it seems obvious what is respectful, but as you dig deeper, we see differing opinions start to emerge.

Is it disrespectful to complain or be negative? Is it disrespectful to talk directly to a person about an issue or is it disrespectful to avoid an issue?

The good news is that we don't need to identify in writing all the aspects of respectful behavior because we'd be here for quite some time. Instead, as a leader, the best way to develop the environment you want to see is to use your own actions and behaviors to indicate to staff the expectations for respectful behavior.

Staff continually watch and take cues from you. They tune into how you handle yourself during difficult conversations and whether you make assumptions and jump to conclusions about situations or people.

Do you misuse power or misdirect your anger or sarcasm? In addition to your own behavior, the behavior you support and reward is exactly the kind of culture you will have.

Do you have the difficult conversations with staff when you are made aware of disrespectful behavior that is happening? If you avoid and hope it stops or goes away, you are condoning the behavior and sending a message. Silence conveys acceptance. Your leadership actions, as well as your inactions, equally define a work culture.

In This Newsletter

Supervising employees and leading in an organization is a tough job. This quarterly newsletter provides helpful research based articles with practical ideas to help you grow and flourish in your leadership role.

Business Quote

"Respecting others' opinions doesn't mean being untrue to our own."

P. M. Forni

Fun Fact

When hippos are upset, their sweat turns red.



How do we foster a respectful environment? Although we have started to answer this question, there are additional things, as leaders, you can proactively do to help create the energy and environment of respect.

- Ask for feedback from your staff and colleagues about how you come across. By asking for feedback you are demonstrating an openness to learning and growth. You signal that getting feedback about ourselves and our interactions is important and everyone, both staff and leaders, are expected to continually improve their interactions with each other.
- Reflect on your interactions and be truthful with yourself by asking yourself the following questions:
 - Do I interrupt?
 - Do I talk more than I listen?
 - Am I unreliable?
 - Am I argumentative?
 - Do I impose my beliefs on others?
 - Do I gossip?
- Consider diversity as a factor in establishing work teams and committees. By openly discussing the value of differing generations, backgrounds and points of view the expectation is set that diversity provides value.
- Be generous with your recognition and praise. As a human race we tend toward the negative, which affects the attention we pay to all the positive work being done by staff, as well as the contribution of positive energy and attitude they can bring into the workplace. The feeling of being a valued employee creates positivity and developing a respectful environment can be accelerated by an atmosphere of positivity. As a leader, give generously of your praise.

Remember that organizational culture is not built in a day, and if you are attempting to shift or change your organizations culture to one that includes a respectful environment it will take intention and attention over an extended period of time. There are no magic wands to wave or special pills to hand out to folks, but rather the very difficult work of every day coming back to the office and being the very best model of the change you want to see. And remember, you have support. Sand Creek is here to help, give us a call at 888.243.5744.

About Sand Creek Workplace Wellness

Sand Creek is a women-owned small business specializing in providing exceptional workplace wellness services to support the human spirit at work. We embrace our core values of service, hope, trust, compassion, and wisdom in each interaction, thereby upholding our mission of providing helpful solutions to improve productivity and shining a light in the darkest of moments.

Our Employee Assistance Program (EAP) is designed to offer face-to-face counseling and consulting to those that voluntarily reach out to us. We are not simply a phone counseling service or online tool type EAP. Thousands of professional counselors form a worldwide Sand Creek network available to deliver personal care and support to you in your community. Our services are administered nationally, but delivered locally.

Sand Creek supports the relationship between individual health and overall organizational health. Our Organization Assistance Program (OAP) service extends the reach into the organization and provides work teams with a systemic approach to improve the health and well-being of an organization.