

Resisting Negativity: A Challenging Task in Challenging Times

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In times such as these, it would be easy to deal with the feelings of anxiety, fear, anger, and frustration by coping mechanisms (I use this term loosely. They are ways of coping, just not very effective ones) such as gossiping, creating coalitions, triangles, etc. Although these methods may alleviate the stress for a time being, they ultimately will begin to unravel any sense of community left in an unstable organization. Instead of being pulled into these patterns, make it your personal responsibility to combat the negative energy that will likely be surrounding you during this time of uncertainty and transition. Here are some ways of identifying negative patterns of interaction in the workplace.

Triangles are characterized as two people (or two groups of people) pulling another leg into their triangle in an attempt to make it more stable. Take a look at this triangle. \triangle Now, picture communication through this triangle. Direct communication between two individuals becomes impossible; therefore any correspondence is then diverted through the third leg of the triangle. Have you ever been that third leg, triangulated into an intense conflict between two other people in the workplace? How can you avoid getting involved in these triangles?



Remember that game we used to play out on the playground called “Red Rover”? As I recall the game, one team of individuals would yell “Red Rover, Red Rover, send (insert name) right over.” Then whoever was called out would run through the arms of the other team attempting to break their grip. If the link was broken, the runner would get to take one of the opposing team members over to their side, adding to the size of their coalition. If the link was not broken, the runner was, in essence, captured and had to remain with the opposing team, adding to their size.

Although this game seems a bit odd to me now that I think of it, it does remind me all too much of something that occurs frequently in human interaction. It is referred to as a **coalition**. In human interaction, coalitions can be very positive and useful, or very negative and harmful. In any case, they are powerful. Are you familiar with the office staff member that calls you over to his/her side, attempting to capture you or sway you over to their point of view, sucking you into their negativity? Maybe you are the one who breaks the link of arms and steals another player over to your side. Well...in reality the team with the most players doesn't really win if the team is filled with negativity, animosity, and pessimism.

- How can you do your part to avoid playing this game and being pulled into negative coalitions?
- How can you do your part to create positive coalitions?
- Red Rover can be a game of strength. In what ways can you offer strength and support to your office, making the link even more stable with the addition of other positive leadership?

Ever been to a place called Rumor Ville? Unfortunately, you have probably visited there a time or two in your life. When stressful times arise, so do **rumors** and **gossip**. Often when we are feeling anxious or apprehensive about situations that appear to be out of our control, we revert to spreading gossip. Whether the gossip is the truth as we view it or somewhat of an exaggeration, it seems to serve the purpose of empowerment. In times of crisis, rumors and gossip allow us to regain that sense of control that we feel we have lost. However, along with the rumors come the panic-mode, the catastrophic thoughts, the intense emotion that perpetuate our feelings of anxiety. Consider the idea of "locus of control". Locus of control refers to people who are able to place a sense of control within themselves (Strauser, Ketz, Keim, 2002). What do I mean by that? Well, obviously we can't control many of the things occurring within the agency but the issue is what we do with those events, how we manage and perceive them. Do we tell ourselves that we are the helpless victims or that we can manage somehow? People who see themselves as out of control, who place the locus of control somewhere out there, are those who see themselves as society's victims. How can you avoid feeling like a victim?

Do your very best during these challenging times to avoid the pessimism and negative interaction, communication, and self talk. The more you are able to resist being a part of the negativity, the better you will feel about your work, about those who surround you, and most importantly, yourself.

References: Strauser, D., Ketz, K., Keim, J. (2002). Journal of Rehabilitation v. 68 (1) p. 20-26.