

The Impact of FEAR!!!!

Michael Stickler

In virtually every business that I visit there is reluctance for the people in the organization to speak up about key organizational issues and obvious improvements? Not to me...but to their leadership.

Have you ever heard these questions?

“You’ve got to be careful on that subject.”

“That topic is a third rail.” (I heard this one just last week)

“You can never be fully honest around here.”

“You just never know how (he, she or it) will react.”

“Your not going to tell THEM what I said, are you?”

“Be careful, that lady has a way of getting back at you.”

These questions are a clear indication that FEAR exists in your organization!

“FEAR” is feeling threatened by possible repercussions or reprisals as a result of speaking up about work-related concerns, ideas, and suggestions for improvement.

Normally when people hear the word FEAR connected with the workplace they think about it in many different ways: fear of change, fear of failure, and fear of the boss (a great example is Dilbert’s pointy haired boss), to name a few. These types of FEAR are background noise...the problem is that a little bit of FEAR goes a long way.

Another problem is that FEAR distracts everyone. It creates a tremendous amount of non-value added activity. By examining what your people are reluctant to discuss and why, you create the opportunity to see how FEAR prevents them from doing their very best work. Key point...you’re in real trouble if there is FEAR about talking about FEAR.

So why does FEAR persist? The answer is simple...there is little or no trust!

Supervisors and employees do not trust one another. Each side assumes that the other operates from a philosophy of self-interest, and each side is expected to try to achieve its self-interest at the expense of the other.

What perpetuates the mistrust? It almost always starts with a negative assumption on the supervisor's part or on the employee's part. What you see is both sides engaging in such activities as: blaming, finger-pointing, excuses, controlling/restricting the flow of information, restricting participation in important decisions, creating us-versus-them distinctions, reinforcing mandated structures, authority and rights, discrediting others, undermining or sabotaging others' efforts, creating dumb rules, and expressing cynicism.

How do you start to attack the FEAR? You start by establishing an environment of trust.

Establishing a trusting environment requires changing core behaviors! It's not what you say it's what you do. Actions speak volumes!

Here are some daily actions that you can take:

Give credit for good work being done.

"Thank You" goes a long way.

Take responsibility, rather than making excuses.

Share information openly, remember that information is power.

Collaborate on important issues, involve the stakeholders.

Always use we, rather than creating "us-and-them" distinctions.

Focus everyone on a common purpose.

Always respect organizational structures and roles.

Value each other's backgrounds and perspectives.

Openly voice concerns, criticisms and conflicts in a positive way.

Always speak positively about the work, the organization and the future.

Remember to be patient and persistent. It is the only way to change the assumptions that lead to FEAR! Banish FEAR from your organization.