

Special Leadership Situation for Associates Quick to Anger

By Ed Oakley

Gary owns a courier service in Denver, Colorado. We met in Starbucks, and when he discovered what I do, he asked for some advice. His situation was that he had a delivery contractor who had a bad attitude along with some behavioral issues. On top of that difficult situation, Gary needed to *lower* the contractor's compensation as a percentage of revenue, as the current situation was not profitable for the company.

My coaching to him was basically to use the essence of the Framework for Leadership™. I'll bet you're thinking, "what a surprise!" The idea was to first set the context that he, Gary, wanted to have some conversation around some situations that existed and that his intent was to create a win-win for both parties. Then, Gary was to create an honoring environment by sharing a number of things he appreciated about the contractor and their relationship (Step 1 of the Framework). I suggested he be as detailed and extensive as he could be on this part, but most important, sincere. I also encouraged him to get input from the contractor.

I suggested he then provide leadership by sharing his vision of the ideal relationship between the contractor and the company and Gary, as well as his vision for the company - particularly as it related to the interest of the contractor (Step 3). This would naturally create some gaps between the vision and the current reality. For example, sharing the importance of company profitability on its ongoing viability sets the context for discussion of compensation.

The intent of all of this was to create an honoring environment for the difficult discussion that was needed about important changes - both compensation and attitude/behavior. There is never a silver bullet, a perfect solution to a complex problem like this, but creating the positive, honoring environment is about as good as you can do.

The morning after their meeting, Gary came into Starbucks and said, "It did NOT work! The contractor left the meeting in a huff (anger)." I immediately realized something that I had missed in my coaching and think it is worth sharing. This contractor was quick to anger. Gary knew that. Many of us are familiar with the term "a short fuse," meaning they tend to "blow up" or anger easily.

When we are dealing with this kind of person, there is a high probability - regardless of how well we handle the situation - that they will be upset. We cannot take responsibility for their behavior. It IS important for us to allow them to be wherever they are and who they are, and not try to fix them. This is an example of leading and not trying to manage, which doesn't work with people anyway.

Here is the "rest of the story." The next day, Gary shared that the contractor had come in the next day with a great attitude - BETTER than if nothing had ever happened. Ever since then, the contractor has been much better to work with and they have had

discussions and reached agreement about the compensation. The process DID WORK!
The relationship is better than ever and now a profitable one.

As leaders/managers, it is important to honor people the best we can, then let go of the outcome. Trust that some people will need to do some personal processing before they are complete with the situation. I know of no way around that. Trust the Framework!

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