

"Live & Work Wise"

Nothing fancy; just a fast, free, fun read to inspire hope & improve skills to cope.
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In this February 2017 issue:

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February is the month for: *Black History, Chocolate Lovers, Valentines Day, and Presidents Day, and I still wish you a very Happy, Healthy & Productive New Year!*

1. Thoughts to help you Live & Work Wise: **Can you "Agree to Disagree?"**

November's article titled "Life After Elections" generated the most responses ever since I started this e-Newz series back in the 20th century. The majority of comments were from people who are also frustrated about coworkers who let disagreement get in the way of a professional relationship, teamwork or customer service. So it isn't just my perception that we seem to be losing our ability to find common ground and work through differences. And it begs the question: Can we keep trust at the level needed to work through challenges we face together?

What about your profession or workplace -- Is this happening, and if so is it acceptable? Can your organization succeed in it's mission if people decide not to communicate or cooperate with others simply because they disagree on one thing, even if it's a significant difference? What can leaders do to create an environment where people can "**Agree to Disagree**" when differences are present, and keep your team focused on the bigger picture of mission, goals, and professionalism?

The bad news: you can't change anybody. Even holding a staff meeting to announce a new policy or procedure mandating cooperation and communication among people who disagree is not a guarantee it will work. "*You can lead a horse to water ...*"

The good news: Leaders can "set the table" for people to choose to interact in certain ways, and not interact in ways that are detrimental to the team, once they see the "WIIIFM" (What's In It For Me?) to do so. People need to be reminded that their choices/actions have natural and/or unintended consequences, and the importance of mission, outcomes and each person's role and responsibility towards those ends. You need to incentivize/motivate them to chose to do their best, even in times of differing perspectives and conflict.

For example, many leaders are intentional about acknowledging the differences among people on a team, affirming that everyone has opinions, beliefs and perspectives, and that it's everyone's right to have your own opinions. These leaders are also intentional when they express the expectation that people will be a professional when at work, that people should expect to encounter differences ranging from the small, trivial or insignificant to large, complicated and profoundly emotional, and that professionals are expected to keep their focus on mission achievement and to work through challenges and divergent opinions.

And they show this in action by ***listening*** to others, “mirroring” or paraphrasing comments so people know they’ve been heard. This validates the other person’s right to have their opinion/perspective, and to share it. This in turn helps you better understand where they are coming from, and then you can decide how you want to proceed from there. Most importantly, by doing this you demonstrate how to not close the door to further discussion or other possibilities right from the outset because of your own refusal or inability to deal with a perspective other than your own.

These leaders also provide training to help their team members be competent and confident in how to use critical interpersonal skills, such as giving and receiving feedback, flexing your own style when interacting with someone using a different communication style, dealing with angry people, and conflict resolution. And here’s why this type of training is so important:

There are three key workplace dynamics that need to be addressed directly to increase peoples’ capacity to “agree to disagree”:

- (1) The assumption that everyone knows how to give and receive feedback, flex your own style, or resolve conflicts, and that they will do these things when needed; and
- (2) The avoidance of addressing the “800 pound gorilla” in the room because it’s uncomfortable and might be hard to deal with, and hoping the problem goes away or resolves itself; and
- (3) That many people are anxious about encountering a difference of opinion because they want to do or say something, but they don’t know what.

When one or more of these factors are present, the anxiety and stress levels go up, compounding the “problem” that made people anxious in the first place. Good leaders recognize that if you can anticipate things that cause stress in the workplace, and provide people with the training they need to respond on their own, your team members are empowered to feel more confident and competent to respond. Instead of people feeling like a “victim,” they know what’s expected of them and what they can do, so they can act instead of waiting for someone else to wave some magic wand and make everything okay again.

This is why these skills are included in my keynotes and workshops, because they are needed more than ever today. Many leaders have told me they valued inviting me to do this training so they can also sit at the table and participate as an equal member of the team, and reinforce that these are research-based “best practices” that are good for everyone to do, from front line staff to top management.

Please don’t wait for your team to be paralyzed in disagreement (or worse), and for your level and quality of service to be diminished! Have the courageous conversations, express the expectations, set your group norms, do the capacity building and training in interpersonal and communication skills, and give people the permission and power to work through the disagreements, be part of a high-performing team, and achieve your mission! And along the way, maybe you’ll help infuse some much-needed civility so that more people are more able to have more conversations about the things that are important in life, even when we see things differently, and we can create more solutions than stress ...

2. One more thought to help you Live & Work Wise: **Listening, the oft forgotten "other half" of communication.**

This is one of many specific skills I cover in my presentations because I think it's increasingly important in today's world. Listening doesn't mean just not talking while the other person is talking while you're thinking about what you're going to say next. It means putting other thoughts and prejudices aside and really focusing to hear what the person is saying, trying to not let your own "filters" lead you to misunderstand what you are hearing. This is really hard to do sometimes, and requires a constant and concerted effort.

The next thing a good listener does is to "mirror" or paraphrase what you heard to check for accuracy, and demonstrate that you're trying to understand what they're saying. Mirroring is a great method, because you repeat word-for-word what you heard; paraphrasing works to summarize longer statements. Both start with the phrase: "What I heard you say is: ____." Both methods help minimize the chance your filters amended what you heard, because if you're altering what they said they'll tell you. And if you can acknowledge accurately what they said (and that is not the same as agreeing), they will at least appreciate that you listened. It's actually quite refreshing how well this works when people feel like you're actually listening to them, not trying to one-up or put-down. And – it's also your best chance that they will listen to you, and possibly be influenced by what they hear ...

Because if you don't do these things, don't be surprised that the conversation feels "stuck" at the beginning; it's just hard to keep talking if you don't think someone is listening to you. And -- how can you expect them to listen to you like this if you don't do it with them?

Our school district is embarking on a massive building project that will bring out differing ideas of what we do and how we do it, and test the patience and the flexibility of our staff, students and parents as we agree and move forward to make it all happen. Kim Ratz gave a great 90-minute presentation that focused on change and transitions. He led our staff through a multitude of activities that gave our staff tools on how to respond to change and strategies people can use to manage our own morale, be more resilient and to facilitate change in a positive manner. This was a perfect time to have Kim come in at the beginning of the school year to give our staff an informative, engaging, and uplifting presentation to begin our construction journey. I received several positive remarks regarding Kim's presentation and I would highly recommend him. Kim's ability to customize his presentation was extremely valuable. Again, Kim did a great job for our staff at our beginning of the school year all-staff meeting. - Matthew W. Schoen, Ed.S. Superintendent, Delano (MN) Public Schools

3. A few quotes related to "**Agreement**" for the days ahead ...

Which is better – to be happy, or be "right"? - unknown

"Two things I've learned: 1) you simply cannot change someone's mind on certain issues and 2) some issues are so important you cannot stop trying to." - J.S.B. Morse, Everyone Agrees: Book I: Words, Ideas, and a Universal Morality

The reason why so few people are agreeable in conversation is that each is thinking more about what he intends to say than others are saying. - François de La Rochefoucauld

Better a lean agreement than a fat lawsuit. - unknown

One can be very happy without demanding that others agree with them. - Johann Wolfgang von Goethe

You may easily play a joke on a man who likes to argue -- agree with him. - Edgar Watson Howe

My idea of an agreeable person is a person who agrees with me. - Benjamin Disraeli

Peace is not made at the council table, or by treaty, but in the hearts of men. - Herbert Hoover

"I also learned that a person was not necessarily bad just because you did not agree with him, and that if you believed in something, you had better be prepared to defend it." - Hillary Rodham Clinton

"You must be able to say "I understand," before you can say "I agree," or "I disagree," or "I suspend judgment." - Mortimer J. Adler, How to Read a Book: The Classic Guide to Intelligent Reading

"We" multiplies the power of "I". - Aniekee Tochukwu Ezekiel

"I don't need to personally agree with something in order to recognize that it's true." - Chuck Klosterman, But What If We're Wrong? Thinking About the Present As If It Were the Past

4. What I do, how to contact me, and how to unsubscribe.

I specialize in helping people create more harmony in their own life, and in their relationships with others, by making Congruent Choices - aligning your Attitudes, Aptitudes and Actions - so at days end you feel Content, not regret. I do this by sharing keynotes and workshops that inspire hope and help people improve skills to cope (Personal Excellence, Communication & Relationships, Teamwork, and Leadership), and original music, stories and humor to induce some fun along the way!

If you need a presenter who shares content, energy and inspiration, call me so we can discuss what you need, and how I might be able to help!

More info: www.kimratz.com.

Contact me: Click "Reply," or call me at (952) 938-4472.

To Un-subscribe: Click "Reply" & write "unsubscribe" in Subject line to be removed from the list.

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