Know Thyself and Workplace Conflict

Knowing thyself requires an in-depth understanding of "who I am." and "how I am." This understanding is the product of the formal and informal experiences of living life. But this understanding is not the result of simply "having" experiences, but is the result of deep, consistent and conscious reflection on one's experiences, i.e., lessons learned (the good, the bad and the ugly).

Self-awareness most often arises after experiencing an inner conflict which tugs on our sleeve and forces us to change. One of the results of such change is a revised value system reflecting new ways of thinking, be-ing and do-ing.

Examples of experiences that bring us to know thyself are mid-life crises (which now seem to begin at 30!), health issues, relationship issues, career issues, financial issues and mental, emotional or psychological issues such heart attacks, divorces and failed relationships, loss of job, bankruptcy, stress, rustout, burnout, depression and addictions to chemical and non-chemical substances (e.g., food, alcohol, exercise, porn, blogging, etc.).

In the workplace environment, organizational awareness is the totality of each employee's self-awareness. Where employees are more self-aware, workplace conflict can be minimal and constructive. In a workplace environment, where the majority of employees are non-self-aware, workplace conflict can be insidious, toxic, all-pervasive and destructive.

The bottom line is that the way your organization, silo, department or team handles interpersonal conflict can either be an experience of aliveness, vitality, juiciness, collegiality, and camaraderie, or toxicity, demoralization, resentment, disrespect, resistance, and derailment.

The major cause of "loss processes" in organizations is not due to processes but is more often caused by dysfunctional interpersonal dynamics. More and more in today's organizations, success and effectiveness are dependent on the synergies that are created when people are in alignment with one another. When folks' attitudes, beliefs, and values are in alignment, their behaviors are consonant and supportive of departmental, team and organizational goals.

When one is driven by self-limiting and self-defeating personal biases, prejudices, beliefs, perspectives, and assumptions, all of which are unspoken and often unconscious, discord most often rules and ruins the day, rules and ruins the meeting, rules and ruins the processes and rules and ruins relationships until folks agree to "out the elephants" in the room and consciously deal with their dysfunctional behaviors that underlie conflict.

When leaders, managers and supervisors have the strength and courage to understand and agree that "soft skills" are the "hard skills" of effective relationships at work (and do the work that's required to bring people to that level of awareness), defensiveness, resistance, push-back, turf and ego issues begin to be metabolized in a manner that bring people to feel and be freer in their behaviors and in a way that fosters greater mutual respect of the dignity of one another.

The process of knowing thyself begins when one consciously explores "how I am" and "who I am" when it comes to "the way I am", i.e., the way I communicate, how I behave with others. Self mastery consciously explores: one's verbal and non verbal behaviors; one's emotional behaviors - how one expresses one's feelings and emotions (and *if* one expresses one's feelings and emotions); and one's motives and intentions *underneath* one's behaviors,

for example, one's hidden agendas, or one's disharmony where "what I do is out of alignment with what I say".

Know thyself requires taking a conscious look at how we experience ourselves at work and how we experience our interactions with others, exploring the disconnects that exist between what we say, think, feel and do, disconnects that lead to being out of harmony or integrity, being unethical, being disrespectful (in thought and action) that result in counterproductive patterns of behavior, and conflict.

Know thyself requires taking a conscious look at why, for example, I need to lie, cheat, steal, bully, gossip, be disagreeable, disrespectful, resistant, non-trusting, sabotaging, discourteous, and insensitive.

Know thyself requires taking a conscious look at "where I'm coming from" and whether "where I'm coming from" is supportive or limiting to the team, department and organization.

The bottom line of knowing thy self and conflict is this: conflict is rarely the result of "technical" issues. Most often, conflict is based on some underlying fear and is an interpersonal dynamics issue.

People choose to relate to one another on the basis of a "task orientation" or on the basis of a "relationship orientation." Task orientation focuses on functions, roles and strategies and tactics. Relationship orientation focuses on trust, safety, openness and honesty, understanding, respect and sensitivity.

Effective conflict resolution must rest on the fulcrum of relationship orientation, on people, not processes. Organizational self-awareness occurs when the majority of employees are engaged, consciously, from the perspective of relationship orientation, i.e., "who I am" and "how I am" at work, and not solely on "what I do".

A self-aware person is one who examines the quality of his/her interpersonal relationships on a consistent basis. A self-aware organization is one that examines the quality of its interpersonal dynamic on a regular basis. To be an ever effective leader, manager or supervisor, this exploration that leads to supporting people to actively and consciously engage in personal growth would serve us well in an effort to reduce the negative effects of workplace conflict. Focusing on the "technical" alone won't do it...never has, never will.

Questions for self-reflection:

- How would I rate myself on a scale of 1(low) to 10(high) on the following: (a) my being a team player; (b) my relationships with others; (c) how much I trust others; (d) the quality of my communication efforts with others; and (e) my attitude?
- On a scale of 1(low) to 10(high) how self-aware am I vis-à-vis my feelings and emotions, how I came to believe what I believe about the world, the world of work and about people in the world, about my values and what really drives me, and why?
- Do I believe life is a "zero-sum" game...that if others "get theirs" I won't get mine"? If so, why? And, if so, has this attitude brought me more pain or happiness in my life at work?
- Do my relationships manifest trust, dignity and respect?
- Am I harboring grudges from times past? If so, why? Do I really think I can "change the past and make the past better?"

- Do I live my life based on the "oughts" and "shoulds" of others? If so, why?
- Do I have counterproductive work habits and patterns I am afraid to let go? If, yes, why?
- Are my relationships at work characterized as "task orientation" or relationship orientation"?

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