



A Sensitive Situation

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*This article corresponds with Webinar #2 of the Integrated Leader Program~
"Redefining Relationships: Transforming Conflict into Collaboration"*

**Has your boss ever neglected to follow up on an action he or she promised to take on your behalf?
How would you handle that?**

I recently worked with a client who was frustrated that one of his superiors had promised to remove some high level barriers that would enable his project to stay on track. A few weeks later, the action still hadn't been taken and my client was annoyed, frustrated, and at a loss as to what to do. He didn't feel it was appropriate to question the action (or inaction) of his superior, yet his deadlines were looming and he wasn't getting the support he needed. He ended up spending his time and energy "plugging the holes" that were created as a result of inefficiencies that needed higher level intervention. And when it was clear that his project wasn't going to meet the target, he was dismayed to find out that the extension he requested on his deadline was denied.

"What can I do about this?" he asked himself and me in our coaching meeting. Clearly, there was no value in placing blame or thinking about all the reasons why he felt victimized by the events that unfolded. The most powerful thing he could do at this point was to ask himself, "What can I learn from this that will make me more effective in situations like this in the future?"

As he thought back to the point when he realized he wasn't getting what he needed from a higher level, he realized that he had an assumption that kept him from taking action that could have resulted in a whole different ending. The assumption was quite simply that if he questioned his superior he would somehow be disrespecting or challenging this leader's authority. This assumption served as a road block for my client, because it kept him from exploring a variety of alternatives that could have not only helped him get what he needed, but also could have enhanced his relationship with this leader.

The truth of the matter is that my client didn't know why his superior hadn't taken action. The worst case scenario was probably that he decided he didn't want to. But there were a myriad of other possible explanations as well. Perhaps this leader had every intention of following through, and simply forgot. Or he could have misunderstood the importance of acting quickly and decided to defer his action for later. It is not unlikely that there were a myriad of meetings, projects, decisions, crises and other events that needed attention that were competing for his time causing this follow up item to get neglected. While it is true that an inquisition into why action wasn't taken would most likely have not been received well, it is also very possible that a gentle reminder or clarification of the support needed would have actually been appreciated by this leader.

At any given point in time we all have a choice to focus on what is positive or what is negative – what is promising, or what is frustrating. When tension runs high we tend to have a knee jerk reaction of focusing on the latter. And this keeps us from seeing the former, trapping us into a vicious circle that leads to behavior that is neither constructive or productive.

To reverse this negative spiral, take three simple steps:

- (1) **Get very clear on your desired outcome.** For my client, that was to keep the project on track and to gain the support and follow through of his superior in clearing the obstacles he didn't have the ability to influence. He also wanted to maintain a strong, respectful relationship with this leader.

- (2) **Ask yourself a powerful question that will allow you to recognize the best course of action you could take to achieve your end goal.** My client decided that in the future, his question would be “What can I do to ensure that I get the support I need in a way that respectfully maintains or enhances my relationship with my superior?”
- (3) **Pay attention to the insights you receive as a result of asking your question.** My client realized that the next time he begins to experience frustration in a similar situation, he could follow up with his superior to thank him for his offer to intervene and let him know that he was still experiencing difficulty. In this communication, he could let this leader know of the options he felt he had control over and make a request for further support. This alternative would reinforce and show appreciation for any commitment his superior made to support him, rather than focusing on my client’s frustration that the commitment wasn’t necessarily executed in a way that led to results.

This is one of many examples of conflicts that people have difficulty resolving. What do you find most challenging? In this month’s Integrated Leader Program™ webinar, we will be exploring conflict resolution in greater detail, including the pitfalls people tend to fall into that keep them from getting the results they want, as well as strategies for overcoming these and other obstacles. I encourage you to come to the call with a specific situation you can directly apply these concepts to.

I look forward to working with you in this month’s webinar, Redefining Relationships: Transforming Conflict into Collaboration. Until then, this is Diane Bolden signing off and encouraging you to Unleash the Extraordinary!

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