

Is Your Workplace Toxic?

By Sharon Lewis and John Doan

It is not a stretch anymore to imagine that the physical environment at a workplace can make you sick – Sick Building Syndrome is a well-established phenomenon. But what about the emotional environment at work?

Don't overlook the impact that stress and poor interpersonal dynamics can have on health and wellness. If you are an employee, this directly affects your personal health and ability to support yourself and family financially. If you are an employer, it directly affects your bottom line because it inevitably depends on your people!

So what makes a workplace emotionally toxic and what can be done about it?

What are the politics in your office or building? What are the relationships like, both with your peers, your “boss” and your “direct reports”? Can you talk to them? Are they open to feedback? Do they value your contributions?

Are you often overwhelmed at work? Busier than you want to be? Needed a holiday months ago? Do you feel like you have choice about your workload? Are you frustrated? Does anybody care?

There is something that can be done to change this kind of downward work spiral – the Emotionally Intelligent Workplace.

Based on evidence from neuroscience and as popularized by Dr. Daniel Goleman, Emotional Intelligence (E.I.) is defined as the ability to manage our emotions and to understand and manage the emotions of others. Documented results have shown that introduction of E.I. training at work can make a difference:

- Up to 20% increase in sales revenue.
- Up to 60% reduction in employee turnover. Keep your best and most successful.
- Manufacturing production expanded by more than 15%.
- Sales gains of 12% through sales manager training.
- Formal employee grievances reduced by 80%.
- Time lost to accidents/illness decreased by 50%.
- 12 hours of EQ training led American Express advisors to a 2% sales increase – equal to millions of dollars (Kate Cannon, 1994)
- Salespeople selected on the basis of emotional competence had 63% less turnover during the first year (Spencer & Spencer, 1996)

Research has shown that from entry-level work to top executive responsibility, E.I. is the single most important factor predicting success; twice as important as IQ and technical skills **combined**. The importance of EI at the managerial and leadership levels of an organization is easy to understand given that organizations typically lose:

- Half their customers in 5 years.
- Half their employees in 4 years.

The number one factors determining why customers and employees leave their work environment is a breakdown in a key **relationship**. There are many relationships at stake:

- Between a supervisor and their employee
- Between a salesperson and the customer
- Between team leaders and their team
- Amongst peers at similar management levels
- Between management and their direct reports

Furthermore, factor in the relationships outside the workplace that impact the individuals in a corporation or small business and you can see just how important emotionally intelligent relationships are. **What do employees and customers want most from their relationships?** They want to be cared for, to have clear and consistent expectations in the relationship, an appreciation of their uniqueness, to be heard and to be provided with support for their desire to grow. The greatest challenges in the workplace are seldom the technical ones. Most often, they are the *internal and emotional* ones that many find hard to deal with. To lead in any industry requires a mastery of the drivers of loyalty both at the customer level and at the employee level. This is why E.I. training makes a powerful difference!

The good news is that emotional intelligence is readily and powerfully learnable. While IQ may peak at an early age, E.I. can be developed throughout one's lifetime. Individuals can be taught the core skills of E.I. such as self-control, empathy, teamwork, self-confidence and goal/achievement orientation. Our world is ever changing and getting faster every year! A great deal depends on the ability of an individual to lead their people and themselves in business and life.

Phil Jackson, one of the most successful basketball coaches ever, led 3 of the greatest players to have ever played the game – Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant and Shaquille O'Neal. In his book, "*Sacred Hoops*", he relates his core philosophy. "*Many coaches are control-oholics. They keep a tight rein on everyone from the players to the equipment manager, and set strict guidelines for how each person should perform...That approach may work in isolated case, but it usually only creates resentment...Other coaches are far more laissez-faire. Feeling helpless about controlling their players...they give them total freedom, hoping that somehow they'll figure out a way to win on their own...Our approach is to follow a middle path. Rather than coddling players or making their life miserable, we try to create a supportive environment that structures the way they relate to*

each other and gives them the freedom to realize their potential. I also try to cultivate everybody's leadership abilities, to make the players and coaches feel that they've all got a seat at the table. No leader can create a successful team alone, no matter how gifted..."

Finishing second was not what Phil Jackson was aiming for. Leadership can start at any level. Change has to start somewhere. If you want your workplace to change, start by being that change yourself!

Sharon Lewis and John Doan are Life and Executive Coaches as well as Accredited Facilitators in Emotional Intelligence. Together, they are the Co-Founders of "The Foundation for Intentional Relationship". To integrate and personalize your learning, look for classes and coaching with "The Foundation" at www.foundation4relationship.com.