teamworks

Making the Workplace Work for You

Managing (or Working) With People Who Are NOT Like You – Part 1

It has been said, "If you were both exactly alike, one of you would be unnecessary" The art and skill behind a true leader is the ability to understand and effectively work with those that are not like you!

Most people would get along with others who had the exact same views, work ethic, likes and dislikes. But our metal is truly tested when we have to work with or manage people who get under our skin and are difficult to motivate or understand!
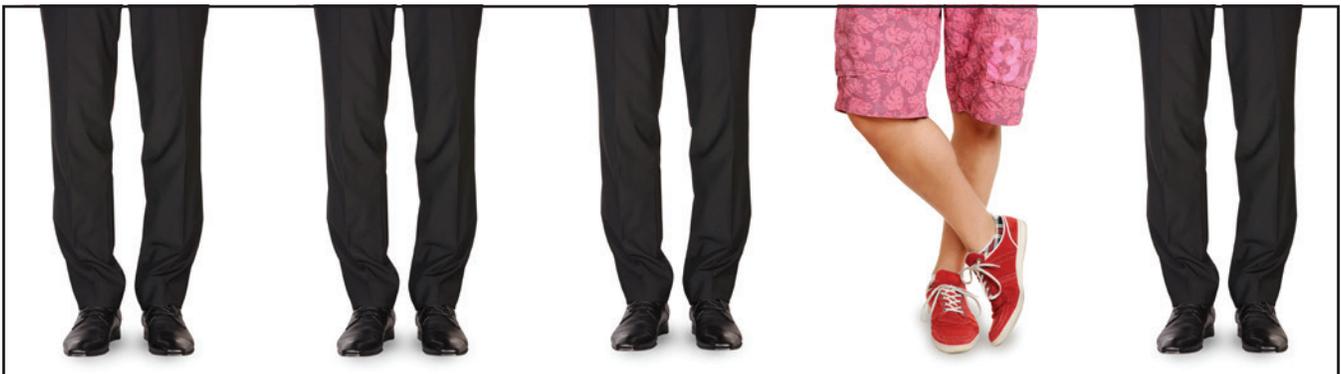
Consider Common Scenarios:

Michael is a newly promoted lead supervisor on a public works crew. He isn't off to the best start in that his assistant Manny really wanted this position. The rub comes when Manny (who has a much stronger personality) has a hard time taking directions from Michael since he has been in the public works field longer and feels he has more experience.

Where does Manny begin when he leads someone who really doesn't want to follow?

Samantha a nurse works with a co-worker who acts like she is in control. She has instructed Emily that when they work and plan the summer schedule, special days or weekends on the calendar need to be passed around fairly and evenly.

Emily, however, consistently grabs the days she wants early on Monday mornings before everyone else arrives. Samantha is cautious to say anything because of Emily's adult tantrums and attitude. How does Samantha break into this discussion?

Rachel works in a planning and community development division in her city. She has very thorough assistants who are organized, detailed and perfectionists. However, she asked me at a City Planning Retreat how she should approach these ladies without offending them because they give much more information than necessary on given reports. What would you tell her as their manager?

All of these differences somehow are related to different experiences, training, background and temperaments.

Yet when working with others we have to figure out a way or position our approach based on how they are wired.

Understanding the Team's Differing Personality Traits

You will never convince me otherwise that there are at least four different types of people or temperaments in the workplace. It is essential that we learn and understand each person's unique style of motivation, communication and work ethic if we are to be effective and build strong morale at the office, especially if they are not like us.

When people are not like us we have a tendency to inwardly judge them and at a minimum misunderstand them. We also can over-personalize their behavior and be too sensitive about what they say and how they are.

The biggest concern, however, is to stay stuck in our perceptions of them and rehearse our frustrations about them over and over again with little to no successful results.

I like to use colors to categorize the different personality types because they are easier to remember:

REDS (Powerful)

Administration-CEO-Supervisors

1. Their key strength is clear vision for the organization and their weakness is impatience.

2. They are motivated primarily by facts and finances NOT feelings or fairness.

Greens (Peaceful)

IT –Research-Design-Mediation

1. Their key strength is methodical and logical thinking and patient interactions everyone and their weakness is they generally avoid conflict of any kind.

2. They are motivated primarily by harmony and by what makes sense Not disunity and conflict.

Blues (Perfectionists)

Planners- Human Resource- Finance

1. Their key strength is planning and organization and their weakness is inflexibility.

2. They are motivated primarily by fairness and being understood Not being talked down to or disrespected.

Yellows (Popular)

Sales-Marketing-Public Relations

1. Their key strength is customer service, friendliness and an engaging ability to mix with all people. Their weakness is un-organization and being too talkative at the wrong time.

2. They are primarily motivated by teamwork and positive processes Not by criticism or negativity.

A Profound Example of From a Leader

I was doing a retreat for a Credit Union management team. At one point the CEO stood up and announced to his leaders that he wanted them to understand how he processed information as their leader. He went on to say that he was definitely a RED (type A) and he didn't want his team to misunderstand his style and ways.

He said "If I'm going from office A to office B, I'm on a track like a train. My only goal at that moment and time is office B. If you walk up to me to complain about how your feelings are hurt from the person in the cubicle next to you or what you and your family did on your vacation, you are going to lose me in about three seconds. Do not take it personal. It's not about you. I value you as a team member as well as the work that you do. It's more about how I process information. I am distracted with where I am going and my mind is focused elsewhere. However, if you want me to focus on your situation you have to get me off my track". He went on to say "let's make an appointment for 15 minutes later when I am off my track and I will give you my undivided attention. But if we go over our allotted time you are going to lose me again". Then he repeated," do not take it personal, it's how I process information."

The management team that day learned more about their leader than they had understood up to that point. They learned in one explanation when not to approach him and why, how to keep his attention, not to take his focused pace personally and that they were valued staff to him.

So it is key in working with others who are so different is that we understand how they view work, what motivates them and how they process information.

For some of us differences in others who we work with can seem wrong, when in all actuality differences may NOT be wrong just different.

Effective Communication Samplings with Someone Who is Not like You

Approaching a RED

First of all we must understand that REDS have a goal in very conversation. They want to know where you are going and what the main point is. If you begin the discussion without giving them the bottom line first you will lose them in seconds.

I was working with a fire department and explaining that when they talk to their RED captain about a flat tire on the Fire Engine there is a right way and a wrong way to explain what happened if they want to keep the captains attention.

I said if your captain asks "how is it going out there" when you return to the station and you explain the flat tire situation by saying, "well captain we were driving up the highway and right near Taco Bell I felt the truck start to wobble and steer funny", he will glaze over and become almost instantly exhausted trying to figure out where you are going with this.

However, if the captain asks "how is it going out there" and you reply, "we had a flat tire" he will then ask what happened and you can say "we were driving up the highway and right near Taco Bell" and he'll want to know more.

Approaching a Blue

You must know that Blues are generally very busy and playing catch up most of the time. As highly accurate and responsible workers they have a lot of spinning plates and they want to do everything to perfection.

Because they are focused on their given projects they can become frustrated with incessant interruptions, so the best approach when communicating with a Blue is to ask them "if this is a good time to talk?" Knowing this was very helpful to me as a yellow because my wife Jenny is royal blue. Yet for a yellow, I never knew this because it's always a good time to talk!

Approaching a Green

These employees are very kind, intelligent and pleasant workers to be around. Frequently they are promoted from within the organization because they are great team members who are fair and balanced. The only problem is that they don't generally do conflict well.

So if you need to talk to this staff member about a concern with a project they are working on, let them know you need to talk with them tomorrow about the project and give them time to process what they will say or explain because they are methodical in their thinking and are not quick on their feet.

If you force a confrontation you will lose because they will simply stop talking. Coming at a green in frustration causes an immediate meltdown, like a power surge protector gone bad.

So present the problem and go away so they have time to think and you results will be greatly enhanced.

Approaching a Yellow

This individual is pretty much positive and optimistic most of the time. They put a high premium on diplomacy and friendliness even when having to confront. This is one reason why they are so effective in public relations and customer service.

If you need to speak to them about something uncomfortable that they need to change or work on as a team member simply put a positive spin on it first.

What I mean is tell them what they are doing right before you launch into where they have gone wrong. They desire approval and appreciation and when they receive it they do better with constructive criticism.

Kevin Lehman, a psychologist and author, tells of the time when it was his first day in the 6th grade. As a cut up and class clown he was approached by his 6 ft. teacher, Mrs. Brown, who abruptly asked him, ARE YOU KEVIN LEHMAN? He sheepishly said yes. She said I've heard all about you and I don't believe a word of it.

As a yellow, Kevin Lehman said, "I broke my back for my teacher that year"!

You see, in working with those that you may not understand, or who are not like you, the art of working with them based on how they are wired can determine the change from a frustrating work relationship to a professionally effective relationship down at the office.

In my next newsletter I'll highlight how different workers feel respected or not and how they can learn to get along with those who had previously annoyed them.