



Sending the Right Signals in the Workplace

Like it or not, we send signals and messages of who we are every day in the workplace.

The signals we send tell people about who we are, what our attitude is, if we are approachable or not, if we are safe with important information, and a thousand other messages.

If someone were to sum you up in a sentence as far as your work ethic and presence down at the office, what would they say?

Examples of the Messages We Send

- Rick is a hard-worker with a supportive attitude.
- Carla is a talker. Be careful how much information you share with her.
- Roberto has been here a long time and knows everything about the campus, but has a hard time with administration.
- As long as you are on Mary's good side, she will be your best friend, but don't cross her.
- I love working with Michael. He always says encouraging words to his co-workers.
- Karen is kind and balanced in her role as supervisor.

- Be sure you give a deadline to Kevin. He usually runs late with his projects.

What vibes or signals are you sending to your co-workers? People form their perceptions of us, right or wrong, and the opinions created in their mind of who we are can be very convincing to them.

I once had a frustrated administrator tell me in a very intense way; "Bill, not everybody thinks you're cute!!!!!"

It took me back a bit because I never really thought about that before, and felt everyone appreciated me and understood my intentions. It truly was eye opening and actually left me with a more realistic way of viewing others' perceptions and conclusions.



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Most of us generally have a higher view of ourselves than we probably should. Feedback from others is extremely important about how we are being perceived. Of course, we can't allow everyone to determine who we are or how we should be, but throwing the baby out with the bath water by writing everyone's evaluation off is inappropriate as well.

I once worked with an individual that had her own business. She was accustomed to being in charge and in control. It was just her and two others that worked for her.

She eventually left her private practice and joined with a larger group. She had several other competent and strong people that worked with her. As you could imagine, things didn't flow quite as well with other strong personalities involved.



Her subordinates quickly felt that she was condescending and not open to their ideas and suggestions. When we sat down as a staff, she was shocked that others had this view of her and immediately requested to work with someone else. She also deflected their viewpoint and told them that it was they who were incompetent.

I don't think we should ever be too shocked by the opinions others form of us. Maybe we said something that rubbed them the wrong way. Perhaps they formed an idea of us based on hearsay. Maybe they have been placed in our lives for a season so that we can learn

something of value. Abraham Lincoln once said, "I've not met an individual from whom I couldn't learn something."

If you feel that others have misperceptions about who you are, or you feel misjudged and misunderstood about your intentions, it's never too late to change your signals.

A mentor of mine told me this story about the best way to change the perceptions of others based on the signals we send.

The Parable of the Sheep Thieves

Two brothers lived in a small village. One day they went on a spree through the farmlands of their community and proceeded to steal some sheep. When they were caught, the penalty for their thievery was to be branded on the forehead with the letters ST (Sheep Thief).

One of the brothers was so humiliated by his actions and the residences' response that he moved away never to return. Unfortunately, he was always remembered as a sheep thief. The other brother decided to face the music and stay in the community. He made changes, built a life there and served the people of his village with a caring heart.

When he died, a packed funeral service was given in his honor. As the crowd reminisced about his life, the story of stealing the sheep emerged as well as the meaning behind the branding on his forehead. One of the attendees stood up and said that the caring man was such an example of kindness and generosity in the community that he always thought the ST stood for the word SAINT.

Only we are accountable for our actions and behaviors at our jobs and only we can change the signals that we send to others. We can blame others, feel victimized, move on, or we can send the right signals of who we are and be appreciated for the value and work we bring to the workplace.