teamworks

Making the Workplace Work for You

Staying in Your Lane in the Workplace

The company environments that seem to have the most inter-office wreckage are organizations with several employees who keep changing responsibility lanes and get off track from what they were hired for, or are best at. On the other hand, organizations with the least personnel causalities are ones who have clear direction, high levels of respect for what others do within their skills sets, and they do not crash over other's lines of responsibilities with their opinions or criticisms of how another does their job.

When staff or leadership live within the lines of their portfolio or job description and do not interfere or micromanage another's tasks, efficiency and unity seem to increase.

Brad worked in the agricultural industry. His responsibility was planting, harvesting and maintaining the rows of crops in a precise order assuring that the soil was the perfect blend and water levels were exact. Mark was a mechanic and worked on all of the farming equipment. His focus was always that the machinery was in excellent running condition. However Mark never really worked the fields and Brad knew next to nothing about diesel engines or the tractor standards of performance.

As long as they stayed in their individual zones they had great yields of produce and a sense of brotherhood and teamwork.

But the moment they began voicing what they thought the other should do in a given situation, tempers flared and defensiveness increased. The result eventually became them avoiding each other. Almost daily it seemed their

goal was to be far away from each other to not have to run into each other. The outcome of not staying in their lane was polarization and reduced morale.

I have a friend that worked in upper management at Proctor and Gamble that referred to this phenomenon as "covering your own square." He said they had found as an organization that more was accomplished from a production standpoint when the team focused on their primary responsibilities and minded their own business.

When someone from another square asked "what was this or that about", referring to someone else's square, he would reply that it was none of his business nor was he the right person to talk to because it was a different square and not within the scope of his responsibilities.

Lane Departures

My wife and I have a car that is equipped with a "vision feature." Anytime we are inadvertently approaching the other lane or the dividing line, an indicator light that reads "lane departure" starts flashing. It seems that even the slightest veering away sets off the warning light and beeping sound. Interestingly enough it is a safety device that reminds us that we are crossing the line and could be in danger.

It's interesting to me that swerving into the other lane isn't purposeful, but it's more generally due to a lack of focus or distraction. Oftentimes, well-intentioned staff begin swerving into roles or situations that are not intended for them. There seems to be some common and practical reasons this happens.

Reasons We Swerve into the Wrong Lane

We swerve when we get distracted
If I don't keep my eyes fixed on the road ahead of me, or I keep looking in my rearview mirror, I'm going to eventually veer. When we start to compare what we are doing at work verses what another does, or envy a co-workers lighter load, we take our mind off our responsibilities and start to go where we shouldn't.

We swerve when others come suddenly into our lane
If another is given a share of some of our responsibilities or has been promoted over us, or a new supervisor wants to switch our tasks or even offices, we can become pretty territorial, inflexible and disoriented. If we stay stuck there, it becomes all about us rather that the good of the organization.

We swerve if our directions are not clear
We can start working in an erratic way when we are not sure of where we are supposed to go or the instructions on our navigation system are not clear.

I am stunned at how many staff through the years have told me that they either didn't have a specific job description or the procedural manual for their specific department was outdated or non-existent. It doesn't take long for a steady workflow that is moving in the right direction to look like a mess of bumper cars spinning and crashing into each other if we are not clear of where we should go or what we should do!

Final Tips to Stay in Our Own Lane

Don't Get Sucked into Workplace Drama or Allow Gossip About Other's to Distract You

If you want to be a part of a twisted pile up of a wreck at work, then get into other's business rather than your own. Note: a quick sidebar regarding co-workers who try to gossip to you, "If they continue to gossip **to** you, they WILL eventually gossip **about** you (in other words, you're next).

Stop Comparing Your Workload or Responsibilities with Another's

As long as you are fulfilling your job description and attaining the goals of why you work there, quit focusing on fairness or a lack thereof. Getting worked up or obsessed with another employee or manager will rip you off of a good attitude, joy, and loyalty to the company.

Stay within the Limits of What You Do Best

Continue to sharpen the areas you are naturally gifted in and you will be an asset to any organization, not to mention the personal sense of achievement you can experience. I had a supervisor remind me one time where I was most needed in the organization and why I was ultimately hired. I was beginning to merge into other's responsibilities and opportunities because I enjoyed their types of work, but it wasn't what the organization needed from me.

Let go of the Past

If you keep looking in the rearview mirror about the past mistakes leadership made or how you were offended by a co-worker, and resentment is allowed to set in, you'll never arrive at the professional destination you hoped for and you will carelessly go nowhere fast.

Be Candid About the Reality of Your Personality Type Fitting Your Position

I have a friend in I.T. who is excellent at his skill set and his position. In addition, he is respected by co-workers and management. He recently asked what I thought about a promotion possibility for him into a management role. Knowing that he is the peacemaker type and immensely dislikes conflict, I asked if he was sure this was a good move since he will be managing others which always involves opportunities for more conflict. After a few days and a good conversation with his wife, he turned down the position. It simply wasn't in his professional DNA to venture out into a zone he wouldn't have enjoyed.

Keep the Main Thing the Main Thing

Really, in spite of your personal preferences or desires to do something else (which is normal), focus on what is vital in your role rather that the urgent voices pulling and tugging you away from your main responsibilities. As the old saying goes, "Better to be a master of one thing than a jack of all trades in many." Recently we had different contractors at our house remodeling, and the flooring expert said he knew other trades as well,

but he was best at flooring because he was faster at it and knew the tricks of the trade. The painter almost used the exact words by saying "I can get by with doing siding on a house, but it takes me longer." Yet he could paint more efficiently and faster than the framer or the carpenter. These men found their main thing, and although they could accomplish other tasks, they weren't as perfected as their main thing which was where they made their "bread and butter".

Final Thought

Whether you are an athlete playing a team sport or you are a gifted musician in an orchestra, the most successful wins and the best sounds happen when each person stays within the realm of their giftedness by staying in their own lane!

For more information regarding Professional Boundaries in the Workplace go to *teamworks-works.com* and click on "workshops" or email me at *bill@teamworks-works.com*

1532

Bill Gallagher has been counseling and working with professionals since 1980. His emphasis in the workplace is to help develop both relational skills and professional standards among administration and staff. He has worked in multiple organizational settings and of recent has spent most of his time addressing workplace issues in healthcare and city government.

Bill formed TeamWorks in 2001 to help organizations achieve their goals for establishing high morale and client satisfaction. TeamWorks currently specializes in offering one-on-one surveys and evaluations for management and staff to assess the current culture's needs and recommended trainings going forward.

In addition to conducting a variety of workshops and in-services on workplace issues, Bill mediates conflict among partnerships and staff relationships, speaks at conventions, facilitates management retreats, and offers personal consultation and counseling for staff.

Bill's strengths are in public speaking, mediation, and understanding the complexities of relational dynamics in the workplace. He lives in Medford, Oregon, with his wife Jenny, and enjoys spending time with their five children and five granddaughters.