

## Respect in the Workplace

*Webster's Dictionary defines respect as a -verb - to feel or show esteem, deference, or honor to; to refrain from violating, treat with consideration; regard.*

*The thesaurus states respect is a -verb- to have a high opinion of: admire, consider, esteem, honor, regard, value, to recognize the worth, quality, importance, or magnitude of.*

All we need is a “little respect, just a little bit” according to Aretha Franklin’s song “R-E-S-P-E-C-T”. Of course Aretha is talking about personal relationships that we often feel excludes the workplace, but does it? How personal can it get when we work side-by-side forty or more hours a week? That is personal!

We all want to excel in the workplace, we want to enjoy coming to work, and we appreciate a positive atmosphere. Knowing that no matter how stressful our jobs may be, we will be treated well by our supervisors, peers, and others makes us not dread the work day. How we relate to one another in the workplace is critical to morale and a productive work environment.

According to research conducted by the Gallup organization, “employees do not leave their jobs due to company performance; they leave because of their bosses.” There are many reasons an employee may be dissatisfied and feeling a pattern of lack of respect is one of them. Some bosses, who in spite of being kind, may not implement strategies to maintain respectful employee interactions; thus, their lack of action is still the reason an employee may leave their job. A continuum of disrespect goes from lack of recognition to harmful behaviors such as bullying. (As a side note, did you know “bullies” in the workplace have a higher incidence of heart-attacks? It is not only stressful and unhealthy for the receiver or observer of the bullying behavior, but it is also unhealthy for the bully. Bullying in the workplace is topic for a later article.)

We all come into relationships and behave in relationships based on our previous knowledge and experience. If someone experienced abuse, s/he may be aggressive in the workplace or shut down around minimally assertive behavior. The same behavior may be seen differently, depending upon our life experiences. Not being greeted when entering an office may be noticed by some employees, but not others. An employee who comes into the work area and tosses or slams a project down on a desk may be intimidating to some employees, seen as a jerk by others, and not even noticed by another. With so many interpretations of someone’s behavior, what do we do?

We can become aware and educated on basic respectful and healthy workplace communication, attitudes, and behavior.

- Expect and earn respect for yourself
- Respect others' opinions, beliefs, differences, privacy, and space
- Encourage and continue professional AND personal growth
- Encourage and practice mutual respect (One simple sign of respect is to not refer to subordinates with terms such as "honey, sweetie, baby, my people, my peeps, my staff" – instead use their "proper name and our team, our unit, our department." People don't like to feel discounted as a professional and referred to as property.)
- Recognize and/or reward initiative of others
- Welcome new employees
- Honor each others' differences and the unique contributions their differences bring to the workplace (Treat others how you want to be treated)
- Be willing to admit your own mistakes
- Do not disrupt the workplace with loud talking, music, or radio
- Listen, be patient, be kind
- Practice looking for and recognizing the good in others
- Do not participate in "gossip" or make fun of others
- Support and role model considerate and kind behavior
- Report disruptive, hostile, or negative behaviors through appropriate protocol (If you are a manager, address these behaviors according to your company policy.)
- Be aware of your own voice modulation, facial expressions, and body language when speaking to others
- Learn to politely "agree to disagree" and respond appropriately
- Help create "joy" and appropriate humor in the workplace (or at least allow others to do so)
- Say please, may I, and thank you

Since we may not see our behavior from the eyes of another, it is good to periodically do a professional/personal reality check. Ask others how they perceive our behavior as a supervisor or co-worker. Let others know they can share appropriately how they honestly feel in your presence without you justifying your behavior or retaliating against him/her. We benefit when we are willing to hear potentially constructive feedback from others. If there are multiple and similar reports (thus a pattern) indicating a need for change of our behavior, it is wise to take that information to someone who can help us understand the significance of the behavior and make a plan of action to change the non-constructive behavior.

Remember our workplaces include people with a variety of skills, talents, and backgrounds. Without each of our contributions, we wouldn't be successful. We may not always like each other, but we can always take the high road and practice mutual respect with each other.

David Balovich, Respect In The Workplace, Creditworthy News 8/17/06; Rana Sinha, How to Gain Respect in the Workplace, Employment, 1/1/3/09

For information or to speak with a counselor, you may contact **CAP** at **(405) 947-2688** or **(800) 677-2729**.