



Are the Three Cs Holding You Back?

Description

“We always get the short end of the stick.” Or, “We’re getting shafted again!” Or, “Why do we draw the short straw?” For decades I have heard people make statements like this when they feel their department or entity is not being treated like other parts of the organization.

This sentiment that other parts of the organization are getting better things and better treatment can happen in a variety of situations. Why did they just get new carpet? Why are they fixing up that store when we need fixing up too? They seem to get all the recognition. We don’t feel appreciated. They get everything.

Statements like these exude self-pity, victim-thinking, and negativity. When you come across this way, rather than wanting to help, people avoid you. Plus, you erode the positive workplace culture that good leaders try to create. In positive environments, people are more productive and creative, trust levels are higher, and workplace relationships are stronger. Not only do positive cultures attract the best talent and enjoy less turnover, they’re just more fun to work in.

All that said, leaders and employees need to avoid what I call the “three Cs”—comparing, complaining, and criticizing. These forms of negativity make life worse for everyone. First, don’t compare. I have found that people who compare are usually feeling slighted. They are so busy comparing themselves short that they miss the positives. A group of employees met with me years ago to let me know another hospital provided more term life insurance than we did. I told them I would look into it. I did, and then met with them and explained that they were right: The other hospital did offer more term life insurance than we did. I then shared that we offered a benefit the other hospital did not.

I asked, “Should we stop that benefit and take the money saved and put it into raising the term life insurance to the same amount? In fact, we can go a bit higher than the other hospital based on the cost savings if we stop offering the benefit.” They quickly said, “No, we like what we have better.” Some may call this type of comparing cherry picking. (I am not just pointing the finger at these employees; I realized that I also needed to take ownership for not explaining our

benefits better.)

Comparing oneself to others will often just cause frustration and lead to feeling like a victim. We all have positives in our lives. Better to focus on those instead.

Another C is complaining. Like comparing, it creates only negative energy. What does it really accomplish? It just wears other people out and makes them not want to deal with the complainer. Yes, it's fine to point out issues, problems, and so forth. However, if you stop there, it adds little to no value. If you bring a problem, always carry with it a solution.

For example, a store in a location far from corporate felt left out in terms of recognition. Managers would even discuss this. Staff picked up on it. Conversations would take place where people said things like, Why are we being ignored? We are getting fewer compliments. Don't they know how hard we are working? I am tired of hearing about other stores instead of us! They packed criticism (the third C) onto complaining.

What is the solution? My suggestion is to take ownership. Let others know all the good things taking place at the store. People are busy. Corporate has lots on their plate. If you don't take ownership of managing up your own store, who will?

Mark Faulkner is the president/CEO of Baptist Health Care in Pensacola, Florida. I met Mark in 1996, when I came to Baptist Hospital as the administrator. Back then Mark was in the very early stages of his career. I felt it would be great for him to run his own place for his development. So he became the administrator of a very small rural hospital in Jay, Florida. Rather than being upset that he was leaving the mother ship, he saw it as an opportunity.

In my daily or weekly routines, Jay would not have been top of mind, but it was. Why? Because of Mark Faulkner. About every two weeks, I would receive a nice email from Mark. He would start by saying he knew I liked to recognize good performance and then share a number of positive results at Jay Hospital. He did not take credit for them. The idea was to recognize staff and doctors at Jay, and also in a very good way, it kept Jay at top of mind.

My point is that Mark did not complain to others that no one was paying attention to him and Jay Hospital. He did not criticize corporate for not recognizing Jay. He took ownership and made the positive recognition happen. No surprise on the great success he is today!

All of this leads me to the last C, which is criticizing. When I criticize someone or something without taking ownership to make things better, what do I really gain? The answer is a brief moment of superiority. Criticizing feeds our "I am better" mentality. It adds little value.

Before you criticize, ask yourself, Is it kind? Is it truthful? Is it necessary? Unless you can answer yes to all three, it's better to not say it at all. This does not mean never give feedback. It does mean do it in a way that makes the other person feel better, not you.

A few tips:

1. Be a solution-provider, not just a problem-finder. This will make you valuable to others rather than being a source of irritation and a carrier of negativity.

2. Don't spread your complaining to others. Take the issue and your solution to your boss.
3. Frame your message in a positive way if you can. Don't say, "We never get recognized." Say, "I know you like to recognize performance. Here are some ideas that may be helpful."
4. Be careful of comparing without having all the facts. Take time to dig in and learn the whole story before assuming you have it worse than others.
5. Manage up your team and organization. Mark Faulkner's example is a great approach.

I am not saying we shouldn't identify issues and try to make things better. It's just that how we approach this makes all the difference. When we are always feeling defensive and slighted, it changes how we show up for things. How we show up is everything. Coming from a place of gratitude, positivity, and ownership gets results—and over time, it makes you a more successful leader, employee, and human being.

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