Because We All Make Mistakes, We All Need To Get Better At Forgiving

Description

How do we respond when someone does or says something we may not agree with? Do we go on the attack with a "got you" comment? Do we react quickly or do we pause to seek first to understand where the person is coming from? Do we generalize? Do we forgive?

There will be times we all make mistakes. My good friend Rick says when a mistake occurs, most of us want *forgiveness* for ourselves and *justice* (our own concept of justice, that is) for others.

I have written many times that a key behavior that works magic is the pause. Today, due to technology, the pause may be harder to do. It is so easy to hit send without pausing! To show my age, I remember when one typed a letter on a piece of paper and copied it before sending it out. This led to reading it closely before sending. Even in today's world of hitting a reply button, I find when I slow down, my response is much better—and at times there is no response at all.

A few weeks ago, I received a phone call reporting that some people were blaming me for something they did not like. I was surprised, for I was not in any way involved. While my first reaction was to call them right away, I have not done so. When I see them in the community, I may bring it up. However, what they are saying is so "out there" it seems to not be worth the energy. (We are living in a conspiracy world!) Pausing is usually a good thing.

These past few weeks have led me to think about the need for forgiveness in workplaces, the ease of jumping too quickly to conclusions that aren't accurate, and how valuable those individuals are who provide solutions in addition to pointing out a problem.

If you have read any of my books or columns or listened to any of my interviews, you know I tend to share that many times a company's issues rest in leadership. I often talk about how people leave due to their supervisor versus their job. I may cite the saying that the fish rots at the head. Sometimes I say that you can tell the values of an organization based on its commitment to investing in training.

Not every business owner or leader appreciates such statements. However, I am a bit different from many authors and speakers who discuss leadership issues. Why? I have always been in an operating role. Thus, when I write or speak on something, it is easy to measure whether or not I "walk the talk."

Most days, I'd say the answer is yes; however, there are days that I don't do nearly as well as I want to do. My point is that if I write about best practices, I better be doing all I can to make sure companies I own are doing them!

I often share with people to do their best to be in a job they are passionate about. There is no job that will not have some tough times. No one goes through life undefeated. Thus, whether one is in a leadership role or not, we will all make mistakes, and we'll all be on the receiving end of others' mistakes. That means we all need to be good at forgiveness.

All of this leads me to my advice in this column:

Tip 1: Don't put others (coworkers, customers, or leaders) on a pedestal. It is not fair to you or them. Despite the best intentions, there will be times when you will be let down if you do. If others put you on a pedestal, they, too, will be let down. You can of course admire others and learn from them; however, there is no perfect person alive.

Tip 2: Pause before reacting and seek to understand. St. Francis of Assisi noted that we should seek to understand rather than to be understood. A good way to start is rather than getting upset to simply say, "Please help me understand." Most often, this will lead to a very different reaction from what would have happened otherwise.

Tip 3: Be careful not to generalize. For example, if one incident happens that a person does not agree with and/or like, the response shouldn't be "what a bad workplace" or "what a bad boss." There are many other positives that have occurred and many more that will occur in the future. Take time to remember the positives.

Tip 4: Forgive. It may be easier to forgive when we ask ourselves, *How would I want to be treated?* If you make a mistake, are you then a terrible person and have no good qualities? Of course not. No one goes to work thinking, *Today I want to make people upset!*

Tip 5: Remember, it is your perception. You may be correct, or you may not be. When I am speaking about career growth, my learning is that people are ready to advance when a number of characteristics come together. The first item is intelligence. Is the person capable of learning the job? The answer is most often yes. The second part is the gaining of experience. Does the person have time to learn the job? The third part is emotional maturity. Can the person take feedback without being defensive? Can they pause before reacting? Do they seek information before jumping to a conclusion?

The most successful people have all three qualities—but the hardest one to master is the emotional maturity. It typically comes last. I share with people that adolescence was very difficult for me. I was in it from ages 13 to 31. Some days I still revert to childlike thinking; however, I am grateful to say it happens less and less.

We all need to ask ourselves: *How am I at forgiveness?* It is a valuable life skill. Because we're all human and we all make mistakes, we need to get better at giving and receiving forgiveness. We're all works in progress. Until that day comes when we're perfect, the art of forgiveness makes life and our relationships so much easier.

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