Changing Our Mindset from Proving to Improving

Description

Most of us get feedback every day. Whether itâ??s a boss, a colleague, an employee, a customer, or a spouse or friend, people are always giving us their impressions of our job performance, our companyâ??s products and services, and sometimes even our behavior. Some of this feedback is positive (and thatâ??s usually our favorite kind!). Other times, though, people have things to say that we may not be quite as excited to hear.

Many of us, if not most, struggle with receiving negative feedback. We get defensive. Our natural instinct is to want to be right and to make sure the other person knows the mistake or less-than-optimal outcome was not our fault. This is our ego in action. At times we may get so focused on *proving* (that we didnâ??t do anything wrong and maybe even that someone else is to blame) that we miss an opportunity for *improving.*

Sure, there are times when you should explain some things. But what weâ??re talking about here are those occasions when the other person really just wants us to fix the problem. Theyâ??re not looking to us to prove anythingâ??except, perhaps, that we are willing to *improve.*

We need to shift our mindset from one of *proving* to one of *improving*. When leaders can embrace this way of thinking ourselves, we benefit in many ways. When we model this focus on improving (and narrate it at times), we can create a workplace culture where *everyone* benefits.

Here are just a few reasons to make the shift:

Â· It saves time. When weâ??re able to let go of the need to prove ourselves right, we can immediately focus on the needed solution. This allows us to move forward quickly.

Â· We get to learn something new. When we commit ourselves to continuous improvement, we get smarter and better.

Â· Productivity gets a boost. When we create a culture in which people donâ??t waste time on things not related to progress, more gets done across the board. The focus on improvement means everyone is always faster and more efficient. As a result, organization performance continually goes up.

Â· It creates stronger, more collaborative relationships. Even if weâ??re technically â??right,â?• does it really feel good to be at odds with others? Strong workplace relationships really matter. Theyâ??re what allow us to communicate, collaborate, and innovate. These are the â??soft skillsâ?• that are so essential to thriving in todayâ??s workplace.

Â· It decreases narcissism and promotes empathy. A focus on proving ourselves right is, essentially, a focus on self. Itâ??s like weâ??re saying, â??I have nothing to learn from other people.â?• Also, the mindset shift away from *proving* discourages blaming and finger-pointing and encourages people to help others find solutions. This breeds empathy, which benefits companies in amazing ways.

Â· All of these things strengthen our brand. The best and brightest talent will want to be on our team. High performers are attracted to positive, productive workplaces where theyâ??re challenged to constantly improve and learn.

All that said, if you have a natural tendency to want to prove yourself right, I find there are three big actions to take. I have written columns on all of these previously, so I will refer you to them.

1. Work on becoming more self-aware and coachable. Click here to read a column I wrote on this subject. A venture capitalist told me once that when he is thinking of buying a company, self-awareness and coachability in leaders are at the top of his list. These qualities are great for many reasons, and for sure they help us make the *prove* to *improve* mindset shift.

2. Keep the ego reined. Ego is at the heart of why we want to prove ourselves right. But a leaderâ??s job is the opposite of that. Our job is to bring out the best in employees and engage them in working together to do whatâ??s best for the company. Thatâ??s why humility is one of the most important traits a leader can have. Last year I wrote a two-part series on this subject, which you can read here and here. I always say that if you donâ??t deflate the ego, it will be deflated for you.

3. Get better at inviting feedback. It is not always easy to move past taking negative feedback personally. However, itâ??s crucial to make the effort if we are to continually improve. The best leaders are those who perpetually invite feedback from others, listen to them, and learn from what they have to say. That means learning how to take feedback well and creating a culture of psychological safety so that employees will be willing to tell you the truth. Click here and here for some tips on how to do both.

When we move from a *prove* to an *improve* mindset, we are committing to being the best possible person we can be. Not just the best possible leader, but also the best possible employee, spouse, parent, friend, and citizen. Life is filled with opportunities to make this shift. I like to quote the adage, *When the student is ready, the teacher appears.* Letâ??s try to always be good students and make our workplaces, our communities, and our world the best they can be.

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