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Conflict Between Co-Workers

When we go to work every day we all have to face co-workers that just get under our skin. It can be for a number of different reasons, they are too loud, they complain too much, they are not doing their job, or they are just breathing when they come in in the morning, whatever the case maybe at one point or another everybody has experienced these things. However, we are not perfect either so we may be that person in the office that most people secretly hates because we do any number of things and we just do not realize it. It is important to take this fact into consideration when you begin to dislike your co-workers and before addressing an issue with them or the supervisor you should affirm with yourself that it is not actually you that is the issue but it is the other party or just the situation. In this paper, I plan on presenting a conflict situation that I have recently been experiencing at my place of work then I will apply what we have learned in the course to my conflict and see how I could have done things differently and how I should do them in the future.

I work part time when school is in session at an auto parts distribution center here in Little Rock in the accounting department, I am a file clerk and a payables clerk when I get the time to I also do bank reconciliations and check on the assets of our stores, so I see a lot of invoices and numbers. Most of the time my job is pretty sedate and I do not have to worry about anything being just terribly over taxing at times I do need to speak with the stores or the CFO but

most of the time it is a pretty fluff job. While I have my file clerk hat on I am responsible for the file management for more than a thousand different vendors, meaning that I make sure that the numbers placed on each invoice matches with the actual number and then if they are correct filing them, if they are incorrect I will go and speak with the person who worked on that invoice and see if it was just a writing error, if they created a new vendor number, or if they paid the wrong person, most of the time it is one of the first two (2) but occasionally I will get the latter one. Here recently I have been getting more and more of it being paid to the wrong people, that's not good because if one slips by me and someone finds out that it was the check was cut to the wrong person then that falls on me and with as many invoices I see every day some are going slip by my notice. So to keep myself in the clear while I am getting prepared to file them I have begun to double check myself and go through each invoice and flip through all of the pages and run it through our systems to make sure things are adding up. That takes a lot of time to do and I have begun to get behind but I am glad that I have started to do that because so far I have run across several mistakes made by the same person so far the largest amount that I have caught has been about fifty thousand dollars. When I bring these issues to the person doing it, we will call her Ms. R, she tries to place the blame on our co-workers and our supervisor saying that she is showing too much favoritism. It is never her fault. Well here recently she has begun to complain to our co-workers that I have been bringing her bogus problems that do not even belong to her and saying that I am putting her files in the wrong spot. That is not okay, because pretty soon our supervisor is going to hear about what Ms. R is saying and I am going to get in trouble.

I have tried to speak with Ms. R on several occasions but it just seems that it does not have any impact on the situation. I have tried to address the situation with her but she just kind

of brushes it off like nothing is wrong, this type of avoidance will just let the issue fester between the two (2) of us making it into a bigger deal than it needs to be. Additionally, it is almost like she is displacing the tension between the two (2) of us onto our co-workers that do not have as much interpersonal linkage power (Poole, Folger, & Stutman, 2013) as I have, or as much expertise power (Poole, Folger, & Stutman, 2013) that she has. This displacement of tension brings in more tension from other parties causing the originally small issue to become larger than is necessary. While looking at the different types of power currencies and their distribution it seems like it is pretty evenly spread, I cannot say much to her because she knows more about the system than I do and she cannot say much to me because I have stronger network. I believe that our conflict can be defined by the fact that we have two (2) differing viewpoints, to me it seems like Ms. R is not doing her job, while it may seem to Ms. R that am just trying to cause her trouble and give her more work. Depending on which side you look at this from the other person is in the wrong.

This conflict with Ms. R, has been going on for a while now and it is still progressing, or should I say degenerating. At first this was just an issue of me believing that she is not doing her job while she thinks that I am just bringing her things that should not be brought to her. It was just a simple disagreement over job performance. However, as time has progressed our relationship which was originally decent has atrophied to such a point that it is hard to see any point of return. Since I am a part of this conflict I can only tell you my part of the conflict which may seem unbiased, and it is, but to me if I am going to have an issue with someone I am going to speak to that person instead of spreading rumors. My method of doing things, however, may come across as confrontational to the other party so I need to be careful of this. We both have

differing opinions on what the actual issue is, and this is what is causing our conflict because we both think that the other party is responsible.

At this company, I have rather deep roots. My mother is one of the directors in the company and she has been there for roughly thirty-six (36) years so I have grown up knowing everybody in upper management. Looking at my interpersonal linkage power, i.e. my network, when comparing it to most other employees I have a very deep reserve of people that I can rely on to back me, not just with the people inside the company but also with the people that I have met through them. This power is kind of like Scott L. Feld's Friendship Paradox, which says that our friends have more friends than we do and their friends have more friends than they do, this gives me pause though because does that then mean that I since I am friends of the people that are my friends that I then have more friends than them, but I digress. So if we look at my linkage power that I have with the company I have a secure base to do what needs to be done as long as I stay within the regulations of the company as much as possible. Ms. R on the other hand has a very poor interpersonal linkage power because she has only been with the company for five (5) years and has had issues in other departments so that alone could cause issue between the two (2) of us. For instance, she may want to go to the Christmas party the company host for upper management but since she does not have many good relations with anybody that falls into that category then she will not be invited to attend, I however attend every year because I go with my mother, this may cause some jealousy between her and myself. I do not go around telling people that I attend but I do admit that if I am asked if I have been then I am not going to lie about it to them that would not be giving them any face.

When I think of face, which to me is your reputation, I am constantly reminded of the differences that cultures place on the giving and taking of it. For example, I am a Westerner

which is an extremely individualistic culture most people will go out of their way to preserve face even if it risks throwing the other party under the bus. In contrast Ms. R, is someone from an Eastern culture which is extremely collectivist, so many people from these cultures will go the opposite way and “wipe off” their face before harming the other person’s that is just a respect thing. This could be seen as another point of contrition between the two (2) of us, if I were to do something that was seen as not giving her face even if I am not cognizant of the slight it will eventually fester if it is not addressed. An example of this could be going to speak with a third party about our issue, say I call the vendor directly to see what the issue is, then since I went around her and cut straight to the head of things then it could be seen that I do not care about her face and I instead want to take it for myself. As someone who is from the West this is a logical thing to do and not something to really get worked up about, but in the East the person that I should have gone through should have been our mutual supervisor, even if it went sideways for the other person that is what I should have done. As I have been interacting with this person I have begun to see places where there is a perceived slight due to the amount of face that is being given the other person.

When I am having an issue, whether it is with another person, myself, or anything else really, I always prefer to have an objective third party present to help and give perspective to what I am not seeing, like if I had not known about the differences of face then I would have been blundering through things more than I currently am. This is not always possible but most of the time that is the course that I would prefer to happen, that way I can get someone else’s thoughts on the issue and see where other people are coming from. I believe that seeing where other people is important to understanding conflict. Another reason that it is important to get others point of view on an issue is because most of the time I keep my peace but if I am pushed

to say something then I am going to say it regardless of feelings, so having that third party could be beneficial to help buffer the impact of our confrontations.

I am usually a very calm person, in fact it is a point of pride that I take in myself, and it takes quite a bit to get me stirred up on an issue. My mother has always enjoyed stirring things up in people's lives, personal and work, and so after living with someone that enjoys creating this kind of mischief I have become more resistant to raise to bait. However, there are somethings that really just push past my bottom line, like starting rumors about me behind my back, or not taking responsibility for your actions. When I come across these things that gets my fuse lit, admittedly once it gets going it goes quickly I have been known to be rather aggressive once I reach this point. In fact, I almost got into a fist fight because someone crossed a rather personal line, anyways, so my usual way of dealing with conflict is to try and compromise with the other party, that way we can both get what we want, sort of. Ms. R her style seems to be much more passive aggressive in comparison to my more aggressive side, while her style is different it is just as effective at getting emotions out of the other person. I think that is a part of the reason why people have different conflict styles, because what elicits a reaction out of one (1) person may not get anything other than a head ache out of someone else. If we look at conflict through this lenses then it may become easier to handle this kind of situation in the future, remind yourself what the other person is doing and do not allow them to have that kind of power over you.

While dealing with conflict it needs to be noted that there is a point in which everybody should just take a step back, take a breather and come back to look at the situation from a new angle. For the most part, during our conflict thus far I admit that we have yet to do this, this may be detrimental to our future working relationship but we have just not been willing to take that

step back. If this kind stubbornness continues it will not only impact us it will also have a ripple effect in our department, this ripple can cause larger waves within the company and have some long lasting effects. Forgiving is not forgetting, and it takes a lot more than just words to enact it. Learning to forgive someone is rarely an instant thing because it is hard to forgive what someone did while remembering it, however, as I stated previously, do not let someone make you miserable. Do not let them have that kind of power over you, in some extreme cases it can kill you, I do not know about you but there are not any grudges in my life that are worth my life. In the end, what we need to learn to do is to let it go, forgive but do not forget that way it will be harder for you to fall into the same trap of holding a grudge and giving someone else power over you.

If at the beginning of this conflict I had any knowledge about these things I would have been able avoid the head ache this has become. If I had payed more attention to the different power machinations that go on between us I could have helped prevent other people being pulled into our conflict through displacement. Had I been more sensitive towards the amount of importance that Ms. R places on face then I would not have gone around her to get the job done. With an unbiased third party the situation could have been somewhat avoided because he or she would have called us out for what we were doing. Now with that being said, I do not want it to seem like I am casting myself as the villain and as Ms. R as the victim, because I am not. We are both responsible for what has happened in this conflict and we are both responsible for making sure that it gets resolved. The resolution may not be perfect but it will at least be something so that we can continue to work together and not kill each other. The process of forgiveness is a long one, however, each journey begins with the first step, cliché I know but appropriate. After

we take the first step towards a mutual goal of forgiveness, and being more accepting of the other ones situation then we will truly be on the right path.

References

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