

Destructive people

"Keep away from people who try to belittle your ambitions. Small people always do that, but the really great make you feel that you, too, can become great."

-- Mark Twain.

The late Earl Nightingale used to say that we should surround ourselves with positive, not negative people.

He had a point.

The other day I was reading some quotations, and ran across the Twain quote at the top of this article. It reminded me that the people we hang around with can affect us – for good or for ill.

It's an old adage: "Birds of a feather flock together."

Well, you should hang around with positive people – like you.

Negative-minded people can pull down a company, a team, a committee, a family. They affect an organization. Their attitudes sow seeds of contention and conflict. Like a heavy weight hung about the neck of a drowning swimmer, they can pull an organization down to its demise.

Although every organization has a few people like this, it's important that you not let yourself be affected by their negative attitude. In fact, just like the physician who constantly sees sick patients, you have to practice good "mental hygiene" to keep from contracting their "negative illness."

Let's look at a few methods to do this.

1. Look for the positive aspects of their contributions. Few people are all negative – they might be having a terrible time at home, or they might be fighting a mental depression. We don't really know what has moved them toward the negative side of the equation – but almost every person has a positive side. In our dealings with every person in life, we should look for the positive aspects of their personalities, and then bend our approaches to those positive aspects. Complimenting the other person on those areas – their positive skill set – can often help you overcome the person's negative approach to you.
2. If the person is dramatically negative, in your dealings with them, it might be helpful to stick to less confrontational methods of communicating – email, phone,

memos. That method provides a paper trail, and so the other person is going to be less likely to fly off the handle.

3. Try and show friendship to this person – as well as other people in your organization, no matter what their mindset or approach to life – but minimize the extent of the contact you might have with situations that allow them to show off their negative approach to life.

4. Just as a physician will wash his or her hands after examining a patient, to minimize the chance of infection, we can institute positive “detox” methods to immediately move from a negative encounter. One method of this is after a negative encounter, immediately alter your physical standing: force yourself to smile; sit instead of stand (or stand instead of sitting); mess up your hair, and put it back into place; or if all else fails, reach up and pinch your earlobe.

Other useful “detox” methods include playing music softly when you get back to your office or car; calling a positive person on the phone; or switching activities for a few minutes.

In other words, after a negative encounter, change something, somewhere – it helps force your mind to make a mental switch into a different point of view.

A lot of companies no longer put up with the negative people around them. A recent book called – I’m going to alter this title a bit – “The No A**hole Rule” suggests that is the best method for companies to take – the negative people around the company drag the company down. That is not always the best thing to do – a lot of people have a difficult attitude for some reason or other, but have a great deal to contribute – but sometimes, it’s a decision that a company will have to make. Just make certain it’s not you that fit the category.

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