



CREATING A POSITIVE WORK ENVIRONMENT

E-COURSE NOTES

Learning Together
Achieving Together

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Session One: Course Overview

Not all of us have had the opportunity to work in a truly positive environment. A positive work environment is important for the productivity of a company, but it is also important to us personally. Our emotional and physical health can be improved by working in a positive work environment. We should wake up each morning wanting to go to work - not trying to think of excuses to not go. We want to be proud of where we work and enjoy telling others about where we work. As an employee, or a leader within a company, you have a responsibility to create and maintain a positive work environment. Everyone has a responsibility to create and maintain a positive work environment. Even if this is not a company-wide reality you can seek to provide this type of environment for your department/division or those within your sphere of influence.



This course will give you tools to be able to create the type of company environment that you crave through building and nurturing effective workplace relationships.

Learning Objectives

After you complete this course, you will be able to:

- Recognize what a positive workplace looks like.
- Know and understand the key elements necessary to create and maintain a positive work environment.
- Understand as an employee what you can do personally to create and maintain a positive work environment.
- Understand as a leader the responsibility you have to create and maintain a positive work environment.
- Discover what type of team player you are and how that relates to your functioning in the team.
- Know the importance of effective workplace relationships in creating and maintaining a positive work environment.
- Know and understand the importance of working as a team and guidelines to good teamwork.
- Discover your personal strengths and weaknesses in working cooperatively.
- Discover your preference for dealing with workplace conflict.
- Learn and practice various methods to deal with workplace problems.
- Learn some of the common meeting problems and how to make your meetings more positive and effective.

Why did you take this course? Use this opportunity to consider your personal learning objectives and reasons for taking this course.

Pre-Assignment

Not all of us have had the opportunity to work in a truly positive work environment. So what does it look like?

Through your experience in the workplace and based on researching companies consider some common factors present in companies that have a positive workplace.

Over the 23 years **Fortune Magazine** have been publishing this list **100 Best Companies to Work For** (<https://fortune.com/best-companies/>) with their partners at **Great Place to Work** (<https://www.greatplacetowork.com/>), they have found three things to be true.

- Inclusion has become the gold standard for employee-centric companies.
- The bar rises every year.
- And no, workplace happiness is not a myth.



Session Two: What Does a Positive Work Environment Look Like?

A Positive Work Environment has a number of common elements including: Transparent and open communication, Work-life balance, Training and development focus and the company working as a team.



In this Session you will learn what a positive work environment looks like.

Introduction

Not all of us have had the opportunity to work in a truly positive work environment.

So what does it look like?

Possible answers:

- Transparent and Open Communications
- Work-Life Balance
- Training and Development Focused
- Company as a Team

Characteristics of a Positive Work Environment

Here are a few common characteristics of a positive work environment:

TRANSPARENT AND OPEN COMMUNICATION

In any organization, communication is the most important single factor for success. This is also essential in creating a positive work environment. Open communication begins by letting everyone in the company know how the company is doing - good or bad! If things are going well it can be a great motivator to continue the great things that are happening. If things are not going so well, the employees can rally and put that extra effort in knowing their efforts will make a difference.

There are a number of things that can be done to ensure good communications. They include:

Be honest and direct

- ensure leadership is approachable

Respect others

- be culturally sensitive
- be open to other viewpoints
- value honest feedback from all employees
- get to know them

Listen carefully to what others are saying and take an interest

- be willing to compromise

Spend time to understand the question then respond

- don't make assumptions
- ask good questions to clarify others' ideas and emotions

Avoid defensiveness

Be careful of your body language and speaking style

- be courteous

Be sure you have something interesting to say

- be consistent and clear in your communications
- include only important information
- express feelings in an open but non-threatening way

Use precise language (especially if you or the receiver is not using their first language)

Create opportunities for discussion about the organization's philosophy, mission and values

WORK-LIFE BALANCE

Just as what happens at work can affect your personal life what happens at home can affect your work. It is important to try to create a positive work-life balance. The balance will allow employees to be more productive and happy at work knowing that their family, friends and spiritual life are all in order.

We all know 'workaholics' and while it may seem that the huge number of hours they are putting into work are great for the company but the neglect of other aspects of their life will catch up and can be devastating for them and the company. Here are some things companies can do to promote work-life balance:

- Provide education sessions on work-life balance
- Have managers model the behavior
- Reward employees who maintain work-life balance
- Offer flexible work schedule - especially during less busy times
- Create job share and part-time opportunities
- Allow people to turn off their smart phones
- Offer unpaid leave of absence
- Allow employees to work from home for part of their week or when they would otherwise need to take a day off (e.g. child sick or school cancellation)
- Have company events that include employees and their families

TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT-FOCUSED

Companies that provide growth opportunities for employees are creating better employees. Professional development opportunities can ensure that an employee keeps up on the latest technology, learns to be a better supervisor, understands the new data management system, understands the legal requirements for Occupational Health and Safety and so many other essential work skills.

Personal development is sometimes ignored and considered to be something that an employee should do on their own time because it is just for them. This can be short sighted - something that allows an employee to develop personally will definitely improve their work. When a company is looking to balance work and life it is important to consider these personal development opportunities. Here is a list of some personal development courses that will create a better employee:

- Managing emotions
- Living ethically
- Stress, nutrition and diet
- Building confidence
- Public speaking

RECOGNITION

Recognition is an important motivator and can go a long way to creating a great work environment. The rewards do not have to be monetary - in fact money is usually fairly low on the list of rewards when employees are surveyed. It can be as simple as an acknowledgement from a senior manager that you are doing a good job.

Often, the tendency is to blame others: I do not have time, there is not enough staff, I need more education, no one wants to promote me. Look at things that you can do and change, to realize you can make changes to get what you want, provided you are fully prepared to do the work. Keeping these things in mind, you can begin to understand the influence you have on your own success.

COMPANY AS TEAM

Humans began working in teams some 15,000 years ago and it is one of the main reasons that the species has survived to present day. Our organization is essentially one big team. We work best in teams but only if everyone is working toward a common goal. There are a number of things that can help to ensure that the team is working effectively. These include:

Engaged people

- It is important that everyone is there for the good of the team.

Collaboration

- Working together and understanding each other's point of view is essential in teams.

Clear goals

- Employees want to know what the end goals are and that they can be part of getting there.

Tolerance and acceptance

- Teams need to be made up of a diverse group of people to ensure all angles and possibilities are considered. It is important that team members embrace this.

Creative environment

- A fun, energetic environment can boost creativity and team effectiveness.



Session Three: What Can I do?

In this session, you will learn what you can do as an employee and as a leader to create and maintain a positive work environment.



As an Employee

A positive work environment is important for the productivity of a company but it is also important to us personally. Our emotional and physical health can be improved by working in a positive work environment. We should wake up each morning wanting to go to work - not trying to think of excuses to not go. We want to be proud of where we work and enjoy telling others about where we work.

What can we do on a personal level to help create or maintain a positive work environment? Here are a few ideas:

- Be kind, optimistic and approachable- build a level of mutual trust and respect with colleagues
- Always be on time, ready and willing to work - actively contributing
- Be organized (including your personal work space) and use your time wisely
- Regularly seek constructive feedback from supervisors, coworkers, customers and act on it
- Be a team player- actively communicating with co-workers, fulfilling work requirements, completing assignments, ready to take on tasks, supporting co-workers, giving credit to co-workers
- Understand and promote diversity - be open to learning about co-workers, listen to the point of view of others especially those with different experiences and background
- Seek to improve your skills by additional training

Making Connections

Fill out the table below thinking of yourself and your own workplace.

What things have happened in my workplace that have helped create/maintain a positive workplace?	
What things have happened in my workplace that have hindered the creation/maintenance of a positive workplace?	
What can you do to manage the issue I can control to help create/maintain a positive workplace?	
What can you do to manage the issue I cannot control to help create/maintain a positive workplace?	

As a Leader

As a leader within a company you have a responsibility to create and maintain a positive work environment. Even if this is not a companywide reality you can seek to provide this type of environment for your Department/ Division or those within your sphere of influence. Here are some things that can help you in that effort:

Respect and trust

- Show employees they are valued
- Allow employees to use their strengths most of the time rather than burden them with things they are not good at
- Allow employees to do what you hired them to do - don't micromanage

Be a coach

- Explain how daily tasks feed into the team and result in accomplishing team goals
- Help employees to reach their goals by pointing out what they are doing well and helping to improve other aspects of their work

Be flexible

- Try to work with the employee's schedule whenever possible. If they need to be doing something else for the morning, and it doesn't affect their deadlines and they have a history of always making deadlines, just go with it.

Team build

- Do non-work things with your team. A morning of go-cart racing, providing a pizza lunch, having a monthly birthday cake for employees are only a few of the team building activities you can do. Try to do this monthly or quarterly. Once a year won't have the same effect.

Show your gratefulness

- When employees are working hard and getting things done, a little gesture of gratitude can help. A gift card can go a long way to make someone feel appreciated and it is not that expensive.

Provide for physical needs

- Personal space, quality of lighting, furniture and even the colour of the walls or cubicle can make a difference in the employee's outlook. Giving the employee input into what their work space looks like (even if it's to pick out items from a list of acceptable furnishings, colours, etc.) can go a long way to creating a positive physical work space and happy employee.

Model the behaviour you want to see

- Maintain professionalism, be clear about your expectations, keep employee issues private and confidential, don't tolerate infighting and treat all employees the same.

Consider that you are the Chief Happiness Officer of a company and think of what you can provide to make employees happier at work. Note: Money is not an option for this exercise.

Come up with at least three examples of things that can make employees happier.

Session Four: Team Player

In a workplace, the actions of each individual affect the whole company. This is why it is very important to be a good team member.

In this Session you will explore the type of team member you are by completing a questionnaire. This exercise will also help to show why diversity is important on a team.



Team Member Roles and Responsibilities Questionnaires

INSTRUCTIONS

This questionnaire will help you to clarify how you operate in teams. Answer all questions based on your behaviour in teams in general. This could include school, work, family, sports, church or other activities in which you worked in a team.

The questionnaire has five sections, each of which will focus on a different team behaviour. For each section, you will be asked to allocate ten points. The number of points that you assign to each statement should reflect your perception of your behaviour at the present time.

The more strongly that you believe you demonstrate a particular behaviour, the more points you should allocate to that item. Be sure to allocate **10 points only** - no more, no less - to each section.

Please respond to every section.

SECTION 1: DECISION-MAKING

When a decision is being made in my team, I	Points
1. State my opinion as a specialist in my own discipline	
2. Explore the full implications of all ideas suggested	
3. Take an independent viewpoint by considering every aspect	
4. Evaluate the impact of possible decisions on other groups	
5. Persuade the team to accept my point of view	
6. Foster an atmosphere of openness in the team so that people can say what they really think	
7. Offer radical suggestions that no one else considered	
8. Structure the discussion so that each member clearly understands the available options	
9. Make sure that the team adheres to a strict timetable for decision-making	
10. Help the other team members to clarify their views	
Total (must total 10)	10

SECTION 2: CREATIVITY

In a team brainstorming or creativity session, I	Points
11. Can be relied on to come up with unexpected ideas	
12. Stand back and comment on what others say	
13. Quickly choose the best idea and encourage others to adopt my viewpoint	
14. Contribute to the session if I believe that I can add something of value	
15. Organize the team so that the brainstorming session is executed properly	
16. Builds on the ideas of others	
17. Contribute ideas that are relevant to my profession or technical training	
18. Create the right climate for a productive, creative session	
19. Bring out ideas from outside the team	
20. Make sure that the team maintains a strict schedule so that the session is productive	
Total (must total 10)	10

SECTION 3: PLANNING

When the team is planning what needs to be done, I	Points
21. Assign actions and priorities to others	
22. Consider the possible implications of our plan on other teams	
23. Make sure that effective planning methods are used	
24. Pull together information and develop comprehensive plans	
25. Contribute ideas pertaining to those subjects in which I have expertise	
26. Make sure that a clear timetable for action is developed	
27. Help motivate my team members	
28. Assist the team in whatever ways seem helpful	
29. Consider each aspect of the plan to ensure that it is realistic	
30. Invent unexpected ways to use resources	
Total (must total 10)	10

SECTION 4: TEAM EFFECTIVENESS

When the team is reviewing its effectiveness, I	Points
31. Make sure that the views of each team member are considered	
32. Present my opinions and ideas when they would be helpful	
33. Get the opinion of people outside the team	
34. Question the fundamental effectiveness of the team and suggest radical changes	
35. Summarize every viewpoint and evaluate the team's overall strengths and weaknesses	
36. Contribute as a functional specialist	
37. Record all of the useful points and establish a timetable for improvement	
38. Take an impartial attitude in order to evaluate the team objectively	
39. Decide what needs to be done and convince others to accept my views	
40. Stimulate open communication among team members	
Total (must total 10)	10

SECTION 5: VALUING CONTRIBUTIONS

Others value my work in teams because...	Points
41. I work hard to create a positive climate	
42. I think of innovative ideas	
43. I am flexible	
44. I contribute specialized knowledge and expertise	
45. I make sure things get done	
46. I build positive links with other teams	
47. I bring structure to team meetings	
48. I provide leadership	
49. I build on other people's ideas	
50. I provide impartial assessment of the team's activities	
Total (must total 10)	10

SCORING

INSTRUCTIONS

Transfer your scores from the questionnaire items to the appropriate boxes below. Then add the items in each horizontal row of scores and record your totals in the boxes provided. You will use these results to answer the questions on the following screen.

Item Number					Your Totals	Team Roles
8	15	23	31	47		Process Manager
2	16	24	35	49		Concept Developer
7	11	30	34	42		Radical
6	18	27	40	41		Harmonizer
1	17	25	36	44		Technical expert
9	20	26	37	45		Output Driver
3	12	29	38	50		Critic
10	14	28	32	43		Co-operator
5	13	21	39	48		Politician
4	19	22	33	46		Promoter

Using your results from the previous questionnaires, consider the following questions.

What is your team role? How could it be developed further?

What are the team's dominant roles? In what way do these roles strengthen the team?

What roles are not represented? In what ways might the absence of these roles weaken the team? How could this team begin to fill these roles or strengthen its ability in these roles?

Record any additional observations here.



Session Five A: Effective Workplace Relationships

Effective workplace relationship creates positive work environment. This includes: Teams, Working cooperatively, Managing conflict, Preventing problems, Dealing with problems and meeting management. Included in this is a Self-assessment to look at how you deal with conflicts in the workplace.



In this two-part session, you will investigate effective workplace relationships.

Teams

In a workplace the actions of each individual affect the whole company. This is why it is very important to be a good team member.

To be effective team members there are a number of guidelines that should be followed.

Listen and share information: Contribute your ideas and solutions, don't sit waiting for someone to come up with the idea- they may not

Recognize and respect differences in others: Diversity should be welcome. If everyone thought exactly the same you could just assign one person to do the task and they would do it exactly the same as everyone else. This doesn't work. The team needs to hear from everyone and the ideas and contributions of everyone should be valued

Ask questions: Unless you understand what's going on you can't contribute effectively. Realize that if you don't understand something there are probably more on the team that don't either.

Utilize constructive feedback: Give and receive suggestions for improvement in a positive environment.

Do your work: If you have been given a task within the team do it. You are responsible for your tasks just as other team members are responsible for theirs.

Have fun: Everything is done better if you want to do it.

Team Experiences

Answer the following questions

What are some of your positive experiences working on a team?

Why were the experiences positive?

What are some of your negative experiences working on a team?

Why were the experiences negative?

From your experience how would you ensure the team experience is positive?

Motivating Your Team

While many think that money, fear and pain are the most effective motivators for success in team, research proves otherwise. The seven triggers for motivation are:

- Acceptance - simply having ideas listened to
- Security - not job security as much as secure in the fact that they can do the task
- Power - decision-making authority
- Sense of belonging - ideas are not just listened to but seriously considered and perhaps implemented
- Structure - everyone likes to know where they fit in
- Sense of accomplishment - from co-workers and supervisors
- Recognition - from outside of the team and organization

Working Cooperatively

Working cooperatively is an important aspect in successful companies. Cooperativity can increase energy, creativity and efficiency by allowing individuals to use their complete range of skills and knowledge in their everyday work. Additionally, cooperative work gives everyone in the company a sense of shared purpose and results in higher levels of morale, job satisfaction, commitment to the company, trust and performance and lower levels of absenteeism, and tardiness.

And the best thing about cooperativity is that it can be learned - you don't have to be born with the skill!

How do you work cooperatively? First and foremost it means showing respect for the rights of coworkers in working toward a common productive objective.

How is it manifested? Some of the ways that cooperativity is seen is through:

- Voluntary engagement in open communication - listening carefully to what others say, respond appropriately to others.
- Exhibiting an awareness of others' feelings, beliefs and opinions.
- Encourage others to contribute and respond understandingly to contributions from others
- Keeping arguments and disagreements to a minimum
- Proactively trying to prevent problems before they occur
- Adapt what you say to suit different situations

Think about the following questions for a few minutes:

What do you see as your strengths and weaknesses in working cooperatively as a team member?

Why do you see these as strengths and weaknesses?

Brainstorm your strengths and weaknesses in working cooperatively as a team member.

Possible Answers

Here are some strengths that may be part of the discussion:

- Establishing good working relationships
- Self-motivation and motivating others
- Supporting and assisting others in the workplace
- Ability to build professional relationships
- Developing networks of contacts and colleagues
- Fostering cooperation and commitment in the group
- Working well with diverse individuals and perspectives
- An active supportive listener
- Creative thinker
- Effective participatory communicator
- Good writer - clear and concise
- Great team player - contribute, motivate and guide others
- Write clearly and concisely

Managing Conflict

DEFINING CONFLICT

Conflict is a very normal part of healthy relationships. It's not possible for everyone to agree about everything all the time, and to do so can squash creativity and innovation. What is important, then, is to learn how to manage disagreements so that they do not harm relationships. By learning skills to manage conflict, you can approach disagreements with confidence that keeps your personal and professional relationships strong.

Another way to look at dealing with people is to realize that we need to have conversations about accountability. If you consider that holding people accountable (i.e., they are taking responsibility for their actions and results) is a part of your role as a supervisor, or at home as a spouse or parent, then these conversations are a part of life. Holding people accountable may or may not become a confrontation, but it is necessary nonetheless. If we avoid these sometimes difficult conversations because we do not like them, consider for a moment whether or not you are valuing that person as a contributor at work or home. If you value them, you are more likely to have these conversations because of your respect for the other individual. We also have to have these conversations with people we do not like for the same reasons.

When you are dealing with difficult people whom you also do not like (we all have people who can rub us the wrong way!), we have an important tip for you before you enter that important conversation. Find something that you like about that person, and you will be able to frame the conversation positively. It doesn't matter what the positive attribute is: they offer good insight in meetings, they are always on time, they meet deadlines, they bring great lunches... just find SOMETHING that you can connect to positively. We guarantee that your conversation will be less likely to get off track and become difficult.

If you consider the conflicting need for safety versus the desire to challenge and take risks (a frequent conflict between young children and their parents), the conflict becomes readily apparent. The child wants to explore and so the need to move as quickly as possible on stairs becomes their focus. The parent is responsible for the child's safety, so they limit the child's access to the staircase. This limited access becomes the conflict, as the child wants to explore, and the parent wants to avoid bruises and broken bones.

Whether at home or in the workplace, we have to consider that both parties' needs play an important role in the success of the relationship. Each side deserves respect and consideration. A lack of understanding can contribute to arguments, low productivity, and continued disputes. This in turn can lead to the total breakdown of important relationships.

When you acknowledge the legitimacy of conflict and are willing to examine issues in a cooperative environment, you can open the door to creative problem solving, more cohesive teams, and improved

relationships. Developing a method to cope and work through conflict empowers people to take control of the outcomes and to contribute strongly to effective teams.

WHAT IS A CONFLICT?

- A conflict is more than just a disagreement. A conflict comes with a threat, and whether the threat is real or not, it must be dealt with in order for the threatened party to be able to move beyond the situation.
- Conflicts become more serious when they are ignored. Since conflicts involve a perceived threat to our own well-being, they stay with us and stay with us and often become greater in magnitude until we resolve them.
- Perception colours our reactions and triggers emotions. This makes it difficult for us to remain objective, even when we look at the facts. Our perception is influenced by our life experiences, values, and beliefs.
- Conflicts trigger our emotional hot buttons. We aren't always at our best when working through conflict because our emotions can interfere with our ability to remain objective and manage things rationally. Learning how to manage conflict during emotionally stable periods helps us to manage conflict more effectively.
- Conflict brings growth. Although we aren't often able to acknowledge it in the heat of things, when we resolve conflict in our relationships, we are also building trust. In relationships with high levels of trust, we feel more secure, knowing that our relationship will survive, and ultimately get even stronger.



SELF-ASSESSMENT

Complete the self-assessment below. This assessment will help you to determine your preferences for involvement in dealing with difficult people and taking on those challenging conversations. Answer each question with yes or no.

Questionnaire	Yes	No
Instead of getting into an argument, I put off certain discussions.		
When someone doesn't deliver on a promise, I judge them more quickly than I should.		
Sometimes I bring up difficult subjects in a way that makes people defensive.		
Let's be honest: there are people I deal with who simply cannot be motivated.		
When someone is struggling, I tend to offer advice, even though they may just want to have someone listen to their ideas.		
When discussing problems, I sometimes get side-tracked and miss the actual problem.		
There are some people I simply cannot work with.		
Sometimes it's not them being difficult, it's me.		
I prefer to just jump in and have the conversation, rather than spending a lot of time planning for it.		
I know that I have to have these conversations, but I do not have to like them.		

SCORING

Add up the number of times you answered "yes" and have a look at the explanations below.

- **7-10:** You avoid difficult conversations. Try out some of the methods for conflict management that we are going to discuss. Consider getting a mentor who you can work with to be more comfortable in managing conflict.
- **4-6:** You are not one to initiate those difficult conversations. You may want to use some of the methods for conflict management that we are going to discuss.
- **1-3:** You're managing well and likely successful in dealing with difficult people.
- **0:** You ought to be teaching this course! Hopefully you'll find a few helpful gems to enrich your relationship building.

EXTRA INFORMATION

Somebody has to initiate the move to a more positive or constructive cycle. As the manager/supervisor, you will be the most likely choice in many situations. Remember, people you encounter may have a low self-image. This might mean they are uncomfortable with someone who they perceive as having more power. That can contribute to feelings of mistrust, or make people behave in what we perceive as a difficult manner. They may view decision-making as a personal threat, and prefer to be led rather than make a decision.

Preventing Problems

THE IMPORTANCE OF EMPATHY

We can do a lot to keep problems from happening in the first place. If you develop your empathizing skills, you can put yourself in the other person's shoes even though you do not have to agree with them. If you are practicing being empathetic (and we recommend that you do) you should avoid phrases like, "I agree" or, "Yes, that's true." Don't reinforce a concern, either. You can simply express your empathy by rephrasing the key topic of the person's statement.

Some phrases you might use include:

- "I hear..."
- "I understand..."
- "I think you're saying..."

The concept of rephrasing before answering gives you:

- A chance to empathize with the concerns
- An opportunity to show the person that you understand the concern
- A moment to think of an appropriate response

It's also important to check to be sure the individual is satisfied with your level of understanding or your explanation. Your ability to empathize will play an important role in your overall communication skills and your ability to foster a positive and productive environment.

DAINGEROUS MISCONCEPTIONS

Although we believe that we are being clear when we speak, we're not always being as efficient as we think. Here are some important misconceptions for you to keep in mind when you are having a conversation:

- People always pay attention when you are speaking to them.
- When people say they are paying attention, they really are.
- When someone says "I know", they really do.
- Saying something over and over will ensure that your listener understands.
- Saying something over and over, slowly or loudly, will be even more effective.

Brainstorm additional methods of preventing problems that you have found successful.

Potential Answers

Look at non-verbal communication.

Refusing eye contact, red face, clenched hands, and arms crossed can all indicate negative feelings.

Reading between the lines.

This is more difficult. We have to listen to what the person isn't saying as well as what they are saying. Do they sound angry, defensive, or put upon? Are they refusing to give an opinion or take action to correct things? Do you sense a reluctance to do something or confusion over what the person is to do?

Probing

Probing is a helpful form of open questioning that can lead you to a deeper level of understanding within your conversations. One of the most common ways of probing is to ask an open question, such as:

- “Can you describe that with more details for me?”
- “Would you give me a specific example of what you mean?”
- “What do you think we should do?”

The difficulty here is that if you ask too many probing questions, the other person begins to feel like they are being interrogated. Be careful with what you ask and how you ask it.

A second, very effective way of probing is to simply pause. Stop talking. People often do not like silences and will invariably speak up to fill the silence.

A third way is to ask a reflective question. For example, the person has just said, “What I really want is more variety in my work,” and you may respond by just reflecting back to them, “Variety?” The reflective question usually provides you with an expanded answer without you appearing to ask more questions. Of course, it is best used in conjunction with a pause.

A fourth method that is particularly useful to make certain you are clear about what the individual has said is paraphrasing what has just been said, in your own words. Example: “So if I understand you correctly, you...”

The last method, most often used as a conversation is winding down, is the summary question. Example: “You have tried ignoring the scent of your colleague’s cologne, you have talked with him about how it affects your allergies, and you have tried shutting your door to keep the scent from your workspace. None of these has worked and now you are asking me to intervene. Have I got it right?”

All of these methods can help make the other person feel better understood and prevent conflict from occurring.

The logo for Kalahari Training Institute is centered on the page. It features a large, stylized green and purple circular emblem with the word "Kalahari" written across it in a white, cursive font. Below the emblem is a purple banner with the words "Training Institute" in a white, serif font. The entire logo is surrounded by a decorative wreath of purple leaves.

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Session Five B: Effective Workplace Relationships

Dealing with Problems

Sometimes we are so busy with other things that we don't see (or don't want to see) a problem that is growing. When it explodes, it can catch us broadside. Has that ever happened to you? What do you do?

Let's take a look at some suggestions and see if we can make sense of them.

- Assess the situation
- Meet the difficult behavior head-on
- Stay calm and objective
- Be up-front
- Make it a two-way conversation
- Put yourself in their place
- Be flexible
- Be tolerant

POSSIBLE ANSWERS

Assess the situation - Think before you act. Get all the facts and start with a plan, even if it is sketchy.

Meet the difficult behavior head-on - Don't bury your head in the sand. This has happened and you must deal with it.

Stay calm and objective - Getting emotional will only make matters worse and you may say things you'll regret. Watch for words like but, never, always, and should. There is no point in waving a red flag in anyone's face. Those kinds of words can inflame the situation rather than contribute to problem solving.

Be upfront with the individual - The longer you wait, the more difficult things become. Say what needs to be said.

Make this a two-way conversation - Make sure that the other individual gets a chance to have their say as well. Give them that chance earlier rather than later. Then you may have more facts. They may even say some of the things you wanted to say, but felt uncomfortable saying.

Try to put yourself in their place and look at the situation from their point of view - You need to put yourself in their shoes to see how they are looking at the problem and to have any chance of understanding it, let alone resolving it.

Flexibility - This is a useful tool, so use it! Treat this as a learning experience and accept that this conflict may change the way you see or do things. That's okay.

Be tolerant - What a dull world it would be if we were all the same! It may not be your way, but that doesn't make it a wrong way.

Meeting Management

An all too common problem in organizations today is meeting paralysis! Have you ever gone to a meeting realizing that you have no progress on a task because you've just gone from meeting to meeting for three straight days? Unfortunately, you are not alone. But what can be done?

Here are a few things you can do to make meeting more productive and have them take up less of your day.

Limit the duration of your meeting

- Most meetings can be finished in 60 minutes or less (or your scope is too big!).
- Be sure to start and finish on time - people will get to know this and realize they won't be stuck in the meeting all morning or all day.

Invite decision-makers

- Many meetings invite too many people. If there are people who are just there to listen consider sending meeting minutes instead.

Remember Diversity

- If you want to have a great meeting you need to have people who can provide a variety of perspectives so that it doesn't just become a mutual admiration society.

Have a preset agenda and keep to it

- You've only got an hour but invariably someone will come up with a question that might set you off on a 45-minute tangent. Use a flipchart 'parking lot'. You can add these items to your next meeting or answer outside of the meeting.

Seek solutions

- Participants in the meeting should be aware that they are there to provide solutions not problems.
- They should do their research ahead of time and be ready for the meeting.
- If material was sent out previously they should have read and understood it. Before the meeting is the time for getting clarification- not during the meeting.

Create minutes that are action oriented

- Minutes should not regurgitate everything that was said during the meeting. It should report: Decisions, Responsibilities and Deadlines

Choose one of the common problems listed below, that are encountered in meetings.

Problem 1: A team member makes a comment or asks a question that is off the subject.

Problem 2: A side conversation takes place between two participants.

Problem 3: Team participants are distracted.

Problem 4: Two or more participants argue with each other.

Problem 5: One or two participants dominate the meeting.

Problem 6: Participants get nervous and are anxious to leave.

Problem 7: The participants refuse to participate.

Problem 8: The leader gets off the subject.

COMMON MEETING PROBLEM SOLUTIONS

PROBLEM 1 - A TEAM MEMBER MAKES A COMMENT OR ASKS A QUESTION THAT IS OFF THE SUBJECT.

How to Prevent It

Be sure that the objective or subject being discussed is clear to all participants. The leader should write the objective on a whiteboard or flip chart before or during the meeting.

How to Handle It

The leader must handle this problem to the satisfaction of all concerned. The first requirement is for the leader to recognize what is happening. Some leaders are so glad to get participation that they don't recognize when the participant is off track. The second requirement is to handle it in such a way that the participant harbours no resentment. Therefore, tact is important.

Here are some suggested approaches:

- The leader apologizes to the group with a phrase like: "I guess I haven't made the objective (or question) clear. Let me state it again."
- The leader tactfully asks the participant: "How does your comment (or question) tie in with the subject we are discussing?"
- The leader tactfully sidesteps the comment or question with a phrase such as, "That's an interesting comment (or question) but it's on a subject that's a bit different. I wonder if I could see you after the meeting to discuss it."

PROBLEM 2 - A SIDE CONVERSATION TAKES PLACE BETWEEN TWO PARTICIPANTS.

How to Prevent It

Be sure the subject being discussed is clear to all participants. Also, be sure the meeting is both interesting and beneficial to everyone there.

How to Handle It

If a side conversation develops, the leader should assume that it's on the subject. Even if it is an incorrect assumption, you are giving the benefit of the doubt to the participants and thereby maintaining their positive attitudes.

Here are some possible approaches:

- Pause for a few seconds without calling attention to them. The silence may cut short the conversation. Look at your notes or do something similar which implies that the pause is for your benefit.
- You might even take a short break; the side conversation may indicate restlessness on the part of the participants.
- Ask participants directly if they would like to share their ideas with group. The manner in which you do it should clearly indicate your assumption that they are discussing the subject of the meeting.

PROBLEM 3 - TEAM PARTICIPANTS ARE DISTRACTED.

How to Prevent It

Keep the meeting so interesting and productive that participants are not easily distracted. Sometimes distractions can be prevented if the meeting is held at the proper place and the proper time.

How to Handle It

If all or nearly all of the participants are distracted, then stop the meeting and recognize the distraction. Don't try to compete with it. Perhaps a break is in order to let people look at the distraction and discuss it. Even though it costs time, it would not be productive to keep the meeting going.

If a small minority of the group is distracted, the leader may choose to ignore it and continue with the meeting. It might be a good place to summarize what has happened so far. Another approach is to stop the meeting and encourage everyone to notice the distraction and then continue the meeting with full attention from all participants.

PROBLEM 4 - TWO OR MORE PARTICIPANTS ARGUE WITH EACH OTHER.

How to Prevent It

Clarify objectives and topics under discussion so that off-the-subject arguing does not take place. To prevent on-the-subject arguing, the leader could say:

- "It's not who is right, but what is right that is important."
- "We want opinions from both of you. Say what you think, but also be willing to listen to and consider the ideas of others."

How to Handle It

The leader could say, "It's not who is right, but what is right," and then concentrate on the thoughts presented and not the people who presented them. The leader can stop the meeting and call attention to the objectives and the need to move toward accomplishing them.

The important thing is to regain control of the meeting without alienating either of the arguers. If the argument is on the subject, the leader should either take a stand or call on the participants for opinions or facts. If the argument is off-track, the leader should restate the objective or topic being discussed.

PROBLEM 5 - ONE OR TWO PARTICIPANTS DOMINATE THE MEETING.

How to Prevent It

If the problem can be anticipated, the leader should start the meeting by encouraging all to participate. If the leader knows a particular person who might dominate, he can contact the person prior to the meeting and suggest restraint in participation so that others can take part.

Calling on people by name instead of asking for volunteers can also prevent the domination by an individual. If the leader is going to call on people to participate, s/he should be sure that the person can answer the question. One of the ways to do this is to ask all participants to write down their answers to a question.

For example, a leader might ask: "What ideas do you have for improving quality? Will each person please write down a few ideas that come to mind?" Then, the leader can call on almost anyone to answer the question and avoid those who tend to dominate. In all cases, the leader should say the name of the person before asking the question.

How to Handle It

The leader should handle the problem without embarrassing the enthusiastic participant. Here are some possible approaches:

- Tactfully interrupt with a statement like, "I think we get your point, Chris; now let's see what someone else (Dale) has to say."
- Give the person a specific job to do. For example, "Pat, I wonder if you'll use the flip chart to record the ideas from the group."
- Interrupt the person with a phrase like, "Jean, I hate to interrupt you, but time is running short and I'd like to get the thoughts of the other people."

PROBLEM 6 - PARTICIPANTS GET NERVOUS AND ARE ANXIOUS TO LEAVE.

How to Prevent It

Conclude the meeting on time. Inform the group, "The meeting will be over at 3:30 as scheduled so let's get through to the end."

Also, try to schedule meetings when people are free from pressures to do other things. Perhaps they are anxious to leave because they feel they are wasting their time and are dissatisfied with the meeting. Be sure you plan and run a productive meeting.

How to Handle It

When people become restless, do something to prevent a disaster. Here are some possibilities:

- Do something to renew their interest in the meeting, such as a project for them to do, a question to stimulate attention and interest, or an energetic activity.
- Conclude the meeting and set a time for the next meeting.
- Give them a short stretch break if you can still finish on time.
- If possible, give them refreshments to help renew their enthusiasm.

PROBLEM 7 - THE PARTICIPANTS REFUSE TO PARTICIPATE.

How to Prevent It

Be sure the meeting climate encourages participation. Don't alienate or embarrass those who do participate. Keep the meeting interesting and productive so participants are attentive and concerned.

How to Handle It

The approach depends on the reason why people won't participate. If the problem is disinterest or boredom, the leader must get their attention. You can call on people by name if you are sure they can answer the question.

To encourage participation, the leader must be very careful not to embarrass those who do take part, even if comments are foolish, off-track, or derogatory. The toughest problem to handle is group hostility toward the leader. It might be possible to form buzz groups of three to four people and give them a specific assignment. The other possibility is to move to another subject and get them so attentive and absorbed that they will forget their hostility.

PROBLEM 8 - THE LEADER GETS OFF THE SUBJECT.

How to Prevent It

Don't get off the subject! The leader must be well prepared and clear on objectives as well as on the approach to be used to accomplish the objectives. Questions to be asked and information to be presented by the leader should be planned beforehand.

Often the leader is drawn off the subject by a comment or question from a participant. Be alert to this possibility. To prevent being side-tracked, the leader should quickly evaluate each comment and question that comes from the group. If it is not on the topic, call attention to that fact and postpone discussion until an appropriate time, during or after the meeting.

How to Handle It

If the leader realizes he is off the subject an apology is in order. You could use a phrase like: "I'm afraid I got carried away and got off the subject. I wish we had time to continue but we have an objective to accomplish. The other topic will have to wait for an appropriate time." If a participant notices that the leader is off the track, the participant should tactfully call it to the attention of the leader.



Session Six: Conclusion

For any Training program, it is important to have some take home ideas that you can use right away to make your training effective.

In this Session you will brainstorm to find your top three take home ideas for creating or maintaining a positive work environment.



Take Home Ideas

Everyone has a responsibility to create and maintain a positive work environment. Each person needs to ensure that their behaviours are not disrespectful and do not erode the positive work culture.

In the space below, write down your three favourite take home ideas for creating or maintaining a positive work environment.

	Idea	What are the advantages and disadvantages?	What resources are required?	How can you get more commitment for this idea?	How can you get people to become more enthusiastic about this idea?
1					
2					
3					



Session Seven: Personal Action Plan

Now that you have completed this course on **Creating a Positive Work Environment**, how will you use the things you have learned? Creating a personal action plan can help you to stay on track, and on target. When you take responsibility for yourself and your results, you get things done.

In this session, you will be asked questions to help you plan your short-term and long-term goals. This final exercise is a way for you to synthesize the learning that you have done, and to put it into practice.

Starting Point

I am already doing these things well:

Where I Want to Go

I want to improve these areas:

I have these resources to help me:

How I Will Get There

	As a result of what I have learned in this workshop, I am going to...	My target date is...	I will know I have succeeded when...	I will follow up with myself on...
Objective 1				
Objective 2				
Objective 3				

Course Summary

Congratulations! You have completed the course "Creating a Positive Work Environment."

In this course, we talked about **how to create a positive work environment**.

First, you completed a check sheet to determine if we were a **manager** or a **leader**. **Both are good** but mean we approach the workplace differently.

Next, you looked at **what a positive workplace looked like** and found that common elements included transparent and open communication, work-life balance, training and development focus and the company working as a team.

Then, you delved more deeply into understanding each of the **common elements of a positive work environment**.

Next you learned what you could do **as an employee and as a leader to create and maintain a positive work environment**.

Then, you explored the **type of team member** you are by completing a questionnaire. This exercise also helped to show why diversity is important on a team.

Next, you investigated **effective workplace relationships** and their role in creating a positive work environment. This included looking at **teams, working cooperatively, managing conflict, preventing problems, dealing with problems and meeting management**. Included in this was a self-assessment to look at how you deal with conflicts in the workplace.

Finally, you brainstormed to find your **top three take home** ideas for creating or maintaining a positive work environment.

You should now feel ready to start creating a positive work environment within your sphere of influence!



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Recommended Reading List

If you are looking for further information on this topic, we have included a recommended reading list below.

Kjerulf Alexander, *Happy Hour is 9 to 5*, PineTribe, 2014.

Kouzes James M. and Barry Z. Posner, *The Leadership Challenge* 4th Ed., Jossey-Bass, 2007.

Merson Len, *The Instant Productivity Toolkit*, Sourcebooks Inc., 2005

Palmer Louise, *How to Manage Stress in the Workplace*, Louise Palmer, 2014.

Stone Douglas, Bruce Patton and Sheila Heen, *Difficult Conversations How to Discuss What Matters Most*, Penguin Books Ltd., 1999.

