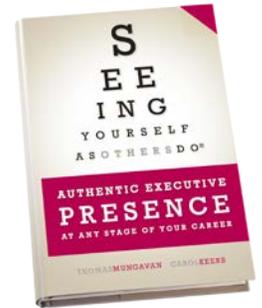


The Spin Cycles of Trust

Recently, a client of mine asked a great question. Jim is a deeply analytical individual in finance who has become increasingly adept at reading people. He asked a question that many people are impacted by every day.



Email Trail

I had received a trail of emails from Jim, asking for help to figure out why someone one level above him, in marketing, was being so resistant to some concerns he had. Marie was someone he needed to influence.

After I read the emails from Jim to Marie, I wrote the following to him,

Jim -

Marie is a marshmallow surrounded by barbed wire and you're roasting her on a stick! Granted, she's been good at expanding her power, but I think you're coming at this in a hard-edged fashion that won't work with her. Marie represents a segment of the population you need to learn to work with – people who are less direct and more collaborative in nature than your direct style.

I ask that you chill out, re-read her email and realize that Marie needs face-to-face interaction to get buy in. I disagree with your analysis – I think you've totally missed her motivation for people growth and development under her wing. Talk to Pat (one of her employees) to get more insights - even though he's a Marie fan, he's seen all sides of her.

Warm it up, Jim, and you'll have more success. This is your chance to improving your persuasion by showing how you're all working in the same direction. Frankly, your email to her sounded like a finance guy rather than a business guy - use a broader point of view and you'll have more success on this one.

- Carol

The back story to all of this is that some folks in the marketing group were frustrated and annoyed by what Marie was doing in her department. They had enlisted Jim, who was new to his role of translating between finance and marketing to do their dirty work.

They spun a very plausible story to Jim and on face value, he agreed with them. His plan was to go deeper to find out more facts, but before he could do so, the marketing folks had already gone to Marie to tell her that Jim thought this was really an issue. He found out later that they had told Marie that Jim felt this was a “7” level of urgency on a 1 – 10 scale. In reality, Jim thought it was a “3” at most. Marie was unhappy about the fact that Jim hadn't come to her with these issues directly – and Jim didn't know this was going on!

Wow – what a story line for a soap opera! This happens every day in companies, however, and it's a big way for trust to get eroded. Here's what Jim wrote back, two days later:

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Good afternoon Carol,

Well, I took your advice, and I think you were right on. I talked to Pat and Joe, who work for Marie and then I went directly to Marie. I think I have totally misread Marie. I realize now that I have been influenced by others in this organization, specifically those in the Marketing department who had an agenda with Marie. Their description of Marie led me to see her the way I did without questioning it adequately.

I'm not certain I understand all the interactions between people, but I'm guessing there may be some underlying tension between people that I am unaware of, and as a result I let it influence my opinion.

Thanks for the advice! It's good I can count on you to help me see the picture more fully or at least re-evaluate my perspective of the picture.

Thanks again!

Jim

Well, that was a nice ending, and for most people it would have been enough, but not for Jim. He has an active, inquisitive mind and wanted to dig deeper in our next coaching session to figure out some steps he could take in the future which would help him change this “spin cycle” of political drama and trauma.

So Jim and I came up with a seven step plan on how to avoid repeating these actions in the future.

Dealing with the “Spin Cycles” of trust

Step One:

Realize the seductiveness of other people’s trauma and drama! Analyze *the Other Person’s Point of View* (OPPOV™) in advance so you are well armed when they try to woo you with, “*Don’t you agree this shouldn’t be happening?*” or, “*David, you’re the only one who can make this happen.*”, you’re well aware of how others try to manipulate. Phrases such as “*she should*” or “*they ought to*” are your tip offs that trauma and drama lies ahead!

Step Two:

Choose to step off the Tilt-A-Whirl. Remember that ride at the fair when you were a kid? It went so fast, you couldn’t focus. Talk about a spin cycle! Do something different for just a moment - stop, breathe, get perspective. Walk outside the building for 15 minutes. Eat lunch. Ask yourself, ‘What are people really asking for here? Sometimes we deliver people a Thanksgiving dinner when all they really wanted was a turkey sandwich!

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Step Three:

Listen / trust your gut / do the “smell test”. If something is off, step back, seek counsel, rethink the facts and slow it down so you can identify what you know to be true.

Step Four:

Go to the source of the conflict. Ask them to explain their world to you from their perspective. It can be unnerving, even daunting, but it’s often the only way you can determine if there’s really an issue, and so they can hear that for you, the issue is only a “3”, not a “7”.

Step Five:

Avoid assumptions. Spin cycles of trauma and drama feed on them, like the microorganisms in yeast growing exponentially. What Jim, my client, did with the Marketing people was to ask them, “When you say this term, it means X to me – what does it mean to you?”. He found he was making assumptions in understanding terms that sounded familiar but had totally different meanings. This gap was throwing everyone off base.

Step Six:

Show empathy for the drama lovers’ dilemma, but don’t go to their extremes. Remember the 5:1 ratio for drama queens and kings who love the energy the spin cycles give them. Use five positive indicators for every one critical indicator (face, voice or content). For some of them it may even be 7:1!! Even if you do not need praise, you will get better results if you use praise with others. When you use praise appropriately, you have more latitude to point out (gently) ways they can be successful with people or groups who challenge them. If they only have one coping mechanism with stress, which is to evoke more trauma and drama, you could help them by modeling another, more healthy way.

Step Seven:

Test your new perspective one last time with everyone involved to double check that you’re all on the same page and that the appropriate compromises and communication has taken place – the “turkey sandwich” determinant of moving things forward accurately. A little more time invested in wrap-up here is nothing compared to having to clean up a mess later on.

In the future, realize the trauma and dramas exist, so be on the lookout so you can stay off the spin cycles of trust.

Carol Keers