

The Truths We Cling to....

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In "Star Wars VI: Return of the Jedi," Yoda has just died. Luke Skywalker fears he is not capable of pressing forward alone. Luke's wise teacher, Obi-Wan Kenobi, appears and provides assurance. Sharing information and perspective, he declares: "Many of the truths we cling to depend greatly on our point of view."

Ah, "your point of view." You can never escape it. Your point of view influences everything you think and do. Your point of view establishes what you perceive as the truth.

Relationships in the workplace are often disrupted because of a difference in point of view. I know certain information; you know some other information. The information is not necessarily in conflict, but neither of us has the complete picture.

I am about to act based on what I know. You want me to take some different action, because you see things differently. The action requires cooperation between us, but because each of our paradigms is incomplete, we experience conflict.

I'm not a bad person. You're not a bad person. Yet somehow, the emotion of anger, sometimes even a sense of betrayal, arises. Accusations are made, feelings are hurt, and relationships are strained. All because of unresolved differences in point of view.

Could the conflict have been avoided? Maybe, but rarely do we see that as a possibility on the front end. Hindsight, however, often gives clues.

What if one of us had admitted, "You seem to know something that I don't know. Will you take a moment and tell me how you see this situation?"

I don't guarantee that every point of conflict can be avoided if this simple action is taken. However, there's little harm that can come from such an inquiry. If one person will ask this problem-resolving question, the other person is likely to reciprocate. Both parties learn a lot. With a more complete picture of all the relevant information, a more appropriate action plan can be generated.

Are leaders immune from having fixed points of view? Of course not. Sometimes leaders have lived with "good enough" for so long, they believe that the way things are is just about the only way they can be. They've lost any vision for something better, yet stimulating others in the organization to do something different seems...well, like too much work.

Perhaps the desire for significant improvement has just withered. After all, to achieve different results will require doing something new. And that requires thinking about the situations the organization faces in a fresh way.

Improvement is change, and change is often uncomfortable. The easiest thing to do is to just allow activities to continue the way they've been.

My advocacy is that organizations conduct periodic professional assessments. They are like the physical exams that most of us have annually, only they occur by interviewing existing employees. The evaluation allows small issues to be addressed while they are still small.

Organizational assessments stimulate new conversations. Instead of just working "in" their systems, people offer ideas for working "on" their systems. Points of view are shared that allow existing "truths" to be challenged. Appropriately, improvement ideas generate a renewed spirit of optimism about what is possible!

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