

## **More Drama or Less Drama--Which is Better?**

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More drama? Well, as you look to the future, probably. Less drama? For some organizations, that might be a welcome immediate relief. Read on!

Everybody has a story. We all have lots of stories. Our stories can reveal surprising things about us. In last week's article, I offered a process for exploring what our stories tell about us.

I asked you to identify for each story who or what filled the roles of villain, victim, and rescuer. (To see last week's article, please go to my website and click on "Dennis' Blog.")

I invited feedback from readers about their experiences. The information was revealing. Many leaders saw themselves as a rescuer or an overcoming victim. A few realized that they were unintentional villains--their insights caused them to examine their past motives and behaviors!

A benefit of this process is that in reviewing "what has been," you are free to make some changes about "what could be." For example, a colleague guided a client through this story process. The individual saw that he had been playing victim to his boss and that he could choose to play the rescuer instead. The experience totally changed his outlook and the actions he's planning to take this week.

Individuals whose personal stories contain a lot of tension between the villain and the victim or between the villain and the rescuer can bring unnecessary drama into the workplace. You've probably experienced, either as a boss or as a team member, an individual who always seems to be experiencing some kind of crisis. Usually, this kind of personal drama disrupts the routine, consistent flow of work processes.

What can you do to reduce the hysterics that develop in your workplace? As a leader, encourage a commitment to collaboration as a valued problem-solving process. The leaders who reported that they were not able to identify clear villains, victims, and rescuers tended to be individuals who have a highly collaborative culture.

When people work together to solve or prevent problems, drama decreases. People feel needed, creative options are generated, and action plans are selected based on their likelihood of delivering desired outcomes. The energy formerly invested in commotion now manifests in celebration for having overcome "villain" situations.

Although disruptive drama is clearly not desirable in the workplace, a different approach to drama is desirable. Powerful, engaging stories focused on "vision" and "values" can generate excitement for future possibilities. And the way to achieve that energy level, according to Annette Simmons' *Whoever Tells the Best Story Wins*, is to "activate enough emotions to momentarily override rational reasoning."

You see, individuals in your organization live daily in the "what is" that is current reality. It's terribly hard to imagine a better future when the daily demands are drudgerous. "Storytelling intentionally uses sensory language and sensory experiences to originate perceptions and emotions."

"People [individuals and teams] crave confirmation of a self-image that makes them feel important, desirable, powerful, and alive." As you get clear about the vision and values you want to instill in your organization, generate descriptions of the future filled with dramatic language that capture the imagination of your team members. The more explicit you can become in your stories about your future expectations, the more people will contribute their energies to generate those outcomes.

A disclaimer is appropriate here. Annette Simmons also points out that what captures the imaginations of some people can totally miss with others. In fact, if a given story captures about 2/3 of the listeners, you've done well. That means that as you build your organization's culture, you need to communicate your messages through many different stories.

That may seem like an overwhelming demand. In reality, however, you tell stories every day in your normal communication. Being more aware of your stories and the effect they have on team members will help you become more effective. And as you build your skill, you'll also build your confidence.

I invite you to experiment with building collaboration into your daily decision-making processes. And I invite you to experiment with building emotional and sensual language into your stories about the future of your organization.

Collaboration will cut down on detrimental drama; and powerful visionary tales will improve commitment to creating a more productive future.

Neither collaboration nor visionary clarity will improve dramatically overnight. However, diligent daily attention to today's activities and your description of what's possible in the future could have a significant positive effect in merely a matter of months!

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