

Non-Blaming, Non-Judgmental: Irritation or Motivation

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PRODUCTIVE WORLDVIEW

Things rarely work out entirely as planned. Economists call this *scarcity*: No one gets all they want, of everything, every time. Every one of us has formed a core belief about what it means when the unexpected, or setbacks, happen. This thinking shapes our next move and how those around us react. It determines what happens next.



Blame is chief among the counter-productive ways of viewing the unexpected or disappointing. Let's say we let fly and vent our emotions. Find someone. Assign blame. It may have felt good in the moment, but did it move us any closer to what we set out to gain in the beginning? It surely will drive the victim further from collaborating with us openly in the future, but could this ever move us toward our goal?

There are other worldviews that do nothing to move us toward the desired result. Escapism is one. But the supreme example is being judgmental: *forming some pronouncement about the inherent worth of another human being*. At best, this thinking is a **distraction**. No matter the energy put into it – could this ever move us closer to what we intended?

There is a **directionally correct** worldview: a way of thinking that admits that, to some degree, we should expect the unintended. Surprise and disappointment are understandable, but in the face of these, we dare not let one another lose sight of the desired result. This worldview is called **learning**. Finding cause – not blame – lies at the root of avoiding a repeat. Blame gives birth to fear, mistrust and hiding of bad news (we may really need to hear the unpleasant truth). Learning allows the real issues to emerge and allows us to collaborate on how to find effective countermeasures. Learners find the personal strength to focus on “What is right,” and not just settle for “Who is right.”

Any determined person with a learning mindset can mine something out of a setback that leverages and even propels us toward the desired result.





Not having foresight to see a setback coming does not mean we cannot “Hitch our wagon to it” and deliver on our commitment. So what will be the next step? We may have to adjust how we are trying to go about it. We may even need the modesty to be corrected about the goal itself. The blessings of democracy, free markets and the scientific method all spring out of the learning worldview and can shape how we choose to think about the unexpected and setbacks. How will we respond? With irritation or motivation, aggravation or actuation, provocation or propulsion? It's our choice.










LEARNING IN ACTION

Let's look at some ways to put non-blaming/non-judgmental learning into practice. First, it is always necessary to point out what non-blaming/non-judgmental does not mean. It does not mean that we do not hold each other accountable. In fact, non-blaming/non-judgmental learning begins with accountability.

Let's begin by thinking about what management owes team members, which includes the following:

-  Processes and procedures that work (when I follow them, I get the desired result, every time)
-  Machines, tools, and equipment that work (they are reliable, fast, sharp, available and capable enough to help me do my work with the desired quality and rate)
-  Accurate information (what is the desired rate, quality level, service level, response time, etc. that is expected and how am I performing right now relative to that expectation?)
-  Coaching, resources and barrier removal when I'm trying to solve a problem (make it easy for me to solve a problem and I'll solve more!)

As a manager, when we see that a team member is not performing according to our expectations, a world of questions should come to mind – remember this is an opportunity to learn. Our first assumption is going to be that we somehow did not give the team member what we owe them, so we ask questions such as:

-  Did you know you were not meeting the expectation?
-  Did you know what the expectation was?
-  Is there a problem with your machines, tools, or equipment?
-  Is there a problem with your work instructions, work standards or other procedures?
-  Are processes used to help you meet the expectation working as intended?
-  Did you know this is a problem? For how long? Do you know how to escalate problems?
-  Can you make a proposal as to how we can fix the problem?

Probably more than 90% of the time, if we ask such questions, we find out that the person ultimately responsible for the problem is us (management, professionals). But, in so doing, we learn (and we coach) which gives us the opportunity to improve. Interestingly, when we do not ask such questions, we can easily judge and blame the victim for being a victim. We fail to learn, fail to solve problems and fail to improve. Through this process we create animosity, fear and mistrust on the part of the team member. There are occasions when we ask the questions and determine that the team member has everything we owe them to perform their work as required. In those (rare) cases, we must be willing to hold the team member accountable. However, many of us could go years before encountering such an instance.

Pursuing world-class excellence primarily involves a cultural transformation that begins with management thinking. This is an important concept to embrace. There is not a manager or executive that we have ever met who doesn't want an engaged workforce, increased problem-solving and continuous improvement. Yet there are few who are committed to becoming non-blaming/non-judgmental learners. It is difficult to adopt: This is where LMSPI can help. We live this principle and coach business leaders in it each day. Consider [starting a conversation](#) with us to explore how we can learn and improve together.