PEACE IN THE WORKPLACE

A Column by Marianne Farag
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Are you Master of your Peace in the Workplace?

To understand the concept of peace in the workplace let's begin by distinguishing it from two other concepts, those being mental health, and wellbeing. Getting a better handle on what each of those concepts is about is important in order for you to effectively manage your peace in the workplace using the best tools. In everyday parlance we tend to refer to mental health and wellbeing as if they are synonymous and we may also be inclined to think that peace in the workplace is basically about mental health and wellbeing. Although all three contribute to each other, and progress in mastering your peace also feeds into your mental health and well being, they also have distinctly different features, with different triggers, impacts, and solutions. So let's consider each of these three in turn.

Mental Health

Notwithstanding the fact that we use the term mental health to speak of our general state of mind, technically, it refers to psychiatric disorders – e.g., bipolar, schizophrenia, clinical depression, among others. In the context of the workplace, when it comes to mental health it's about the fit between the work being performed and the ability to preserve mental health. By way of example, let's imagine a criminal defense lawyer who now finds that,

owing to a mental health challenge in their life, the courtroom aggravates their condition. The remedy would be to determine if there is another type of legal work that would enable the individual to use their skills, talents and experience while satisfying their mental health needs.

Well Being

The concept of wellbeing consists of three components: physical health, happiness and prosperity (economic condition). Issues affecting physical wellbeing could include mobility, back pain, carpal tunnel etc. and their remedy in the workplace might involve wheel chair access, ergonomic furniture and equipment. Happiness in the workplace is impacted by such factors as whether we find our work satisfying, whether we are habitually overworked, whether we feel valued and respected, and whether we enjoy a collegial rapport with coworkers and bosses. As for the component of prosperity (our economic condition) in relation to the workplace, it refers to salary and benefits and whether these meet one's needs. If prosperity becomes an issue it might lead to everything from on-the-job retraining in order to compete for a higher paying position to finding supplementary employment or a new job.

Peace

In the context of the workplace, peace is about maintaining your balance and harmony, and remaining undisrupted by negative interactions/behaviours. If you are routinely jangled by how others in the workplace communicate/behave, if it consumes your

attention at every coffee and lunch break and is frequently the subject you talk about when you leave your workday, then your peace is being thrown off balance.

Steps Towards Your Peace
To gain more peace in the workplace starts with you! To kick-start taking ownership of your peace in the workplace let's consider two strategies in turn: minding your own Ps and Qs; and making sure play is present in your life.

When it comes to minding your Ps and Qs (i.e., taking care of what you say and how you say it), the key is to hold yourself back from reacting in the moment and allowing for sober second thought. Challenge yourself with the question of whether the way you want to respond is going to get you closer to the result you want or will it produce more of the conduct that is problematic? To help you mind your Ps and Qs consider taking a course on emotional intelligence and/or do some reading on the subject. A particularly useful book that focusses on the how to of outcome-oriented interactions is *Crucial Conversations: Tools for Talking When the Stakes are High* by Kerry Patterson et al.

As for play, there is much research into the impact of play which shows that those who engage in play are better copers with difficult situations, and more adaptable to change (see *Play How It Shapes the Brain, Opens the Imagination, and Invigorates the Soul* by Stuart Brown, M.D.). When we are playing we are navigating through creative thinking, solving some challenge, and perhaps developing stamina – think of any hobby, recreational or leisure undertaking from carpentry to gardening, from golf to water skiing, from photography to ballroom dancing and you immediately recognize those features of play. In that sense, play is more of an attitude one brings to an undertaking than the undertaking itself. Play is characterized as that which is self-absorbing, enjoyable, cultivates experimentation and flexibility, and makes you lose track of time. The resourcefulness that comes from approaching activities from the perspective of play can help us to "play" with different ways to implement our peace in the workplace.

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