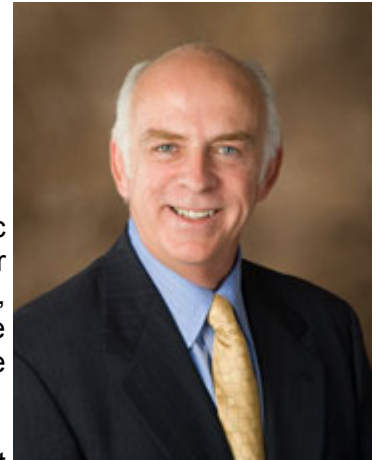


Article

Trigger Point Consulting

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Those of you fortunate enough to have experienced the benefits of therapeutic massage may have come across the term, trigger point. In massage, a trigger point is a sensitive area that refers pain to another part of the body. Simply stated, the area that is tender to the touch may not necessarily be the source of the discomfort. This concept is equally true within organizations and reflects the etiology of many workplace challenges.

As an example, in my training seminars on workplace conflict, I emphasize that conflict between employees follows a predictable path. Its metamorphic journey involves at least two stages, *miscommunication* and *mismanagement*. The theory that an employee “snaps” is one of the myths compounding the issue. In my experience, there are always warning signs prior to an unpleasant incident. Organizations should be training their managers and supervisors to recognize those warning signs and encouraging them to react accordingly.

You’re all familiar with the phrase, “it’s not *what* you say, but *how* you say it that counts.” The saying is true and refers to our inability to communicate effectively. Miscommunication is the basis for most conflict and presents itself as a number of “failures”:

- Failure to assess your emotional state and level of energy before speaking
- Failure to avoid using language that acts as an emotional “trigger”
- Failure to state your needs clearly; one point at a time
- Failure to consider agendas other than your own
- Failure to read body language
- Failure to listen

These basic communication skills are frequently overlooked in today’s fast paced organizations and create an environment conducive to conflict.

Left unattended, they can escalate into more significant problems. It’s incumbent upon management to recognize these warning signs and intervene as soon as possible. That brings us to the second phase of the metamorphosis... mismanagement!

Mismanagement is often the preemptive catalyst of workplace conflict. Once the stage has been set through miscommunication, a lack of immediate intervention is often all that is necessary for the issue to escalate. This phase usually includes another series of failures:

- Failure to recognize interpersonal conflict between coworkers
- Failure to intervene at the earliest point possible
- Failure to provide guidance and feedback
- Failure to enforce policies in a fair and equitable fashion

There are numerous behavioral characteristics and patterns that prevent us from managing and communicating more effectively, and any one of them could provide the basis for another article. For the time being however, I feel it's more important that managers should focus on the two key underlying factors fueling today's problem of workplace conflict and behavioral risk.

Together, miscommunication and mismanagement set the stage for conflict. Managers, supervisors, trainers, and Human Resources professionals wear many hats, including that of internal consultant. The next time you're asked to address a conflict-based performance issue, ask yourself if you may not be treating the system, rather than the cause. You may find that you're dealing with a corporate "trigger point", as opposed to an intentional act of aggression. By the way, if you're interested in testing this theory, you can begin by doing yourself a favor and getting a massage!

For more information regarding this topic we can be contacted via phone or e-mail at info@amsconsulting.com