How to Sell Safety to Difficult Employees and Managers

J.A. Rodriguez Jr., CSP
Raytheon Technical Services Company LLC
Dulles, Virginia

Introduction

We've all been there, selling an idea, a project, a process, or a thought to someone who does not seem to "get it"; to someone who seems focused on derailing every effort set fourth toward progress. Day after day, week after week, year after year, if it is not one individual it is another taking their place; all determined on not making your day (or so it seems).

Questions beget questions in your mind. Why? How can it be possible for an organization to be productive, effective and ultimately efficient with the challenges associated with hampered communications and strained relationships? Why does it have to be this hard to get anything done around here?

The answers to these questions can be as complex as the personalities involved, but one thing is for sure, you can effectively sell safety to difficult employees and managers by (1) understanding how the Pyramid of Purpose predestines perspective, priorities, behavior and ultimately your level of success and that or your organizations'; (2) by applying the "SEE" Principle to the Pyramid of Purpose; and (3) by understanding how the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics determines the amount of work you need to expend to achieve a desired result.

Understanding the Pyramid of Purpose

Do you know these characters and their typical responses?

*   The defiant one: "You talking to me?" "What?" "Huh?" "huh-what?"
*   The pessimist: "Yep … just wait a week … it will be something or someone else!"
*   The passive-aggressive: "Ah-huh … if you say so…"
*   The slacker-oblivious: "Safety glasses? Dude, really?"
*   The clique: "Not me; what about you?"
*   The risk taker: "Gotcha man… but it hasn't happened yet… I got this!"
*   The newbie: "Ohhhh…was that in the orientation?"
*   Seasoned and entitled: "Been there, done that, and this… Grasshopper!"

So the question then becomes, how do you best sell safety to all of them? Is it training or more training or any of these others?

- Discipline?
- Stand-downs?
- Executive memos/emails?
- Departmental Luaus?
- Cookouts?
- Movie tickets?
- Stress balls?
- Etc.?

Your answer is likely, "no". Although the list above is a typical organizational reaction to cultural anomalies, it does not often yield sustainable and meaningful solutions.

What about through the power of influence? Yes, but how? What about through the power of trust? Yes, but how? To find the answers to these questions, another one must be asked: What do all of these characters fundamentally have in common?

At least two commonalities can be identified: (1) Their behavior is detrimental to the success of your company; and (2) they are typically working for a living to meet one objective: financial security.

Consider your organization's ultimate objective as well. Is it not to secure more financial resources to advance its mission? So if both the organization and its employees are seeking financial security, why are the behavioral inefficiencies in place? What is the problem? Why the push-back? Why is there little to no buy-in for your idea? The answer is restfully nestled within two simple words: common purpose.

Purpose is at the base of the Pyramid of Purpose supporting the weight of all that comes after it. It is purpose and its establishment as a commonality that forges an organization towards its view of success.

Most decisions to act or not act safely, to work with you or not work with you or to be collaborative or not collaborative are predetermined. So you understandably ask: Did I hear you right? That decisions are determined long before they are made? That they may not be the root of most problems?

The answer is yes! Shocking? You see, decisions are the result of a process that commences long before the eventuality of the results. This holds true for individuals and organizations alike.

As an illustration, consider this scenario: You have a very important early morning meeting with a VIP client and your top company brass. You are an integral part of this meeting and calling in is not an option. A successful outcome could mean the difference between getting that promotion or getting run-over (I mean, passed-over). Your boss has planned this meeting for months and you have utilized endless dry-runs with your colleagues to hone and fine tune the delivery and the message. You are ready!

You can't sleep the night before. It is midnight, 1 AM, 3 AM, and finally, it is 5:30 AM when you catch some ZZZ's. Unfortunately, you sleep past your alarm clock setting of 6:15 AM by thirty minutes before you realize your VIP client's meeting may start without you. There is

still time if you hurry, you rationalize! Your heart races, your blood pressure elevates and your body moves in ways you never thought possible as the bed covers fly off your feet like paper clip projectiles flinging off a hyper-stretched rubber band; the concept of time seems overly heightened. The valuable spare minutes you have seem to be increasingly elusive as your efforts to slow them down are futile.

After a few choice words on the way to the bathroom and before tripping on Fefe, you simultaneously begin the "what if" scenarios in conjunction with the "how can this be happening to me right now" brain conversation. You are now in verifiable beast mode.

Many things are forgotten in your wake: to reset the thermostat, to bring lunch and the after-work to-do list, and most importantly, to put that career saving presentation in your roller bag. When your car engine starts, tunnel vision sets in further; the garage door cannot open fast enough as your fingertips gently but nervously tap the steering wheel in seemingly symphonic fashion. The skinny and the fat pedals beneath your feet are competing with each other, one moving you forward, the other one holding you back. The skinny one finally wins!

You're oblivious to the fact that there are three neighbors watching your car's tires scream for mercy, in a cloud of thick gray smoke. You even miss the pretty bluebird's song greeting you by the corner oak tree.

Suddenly, blue lights cause you to unleash the brunt of your peril upon the unsuspecting steering wheel with multiple and simultaneous poundings, one after the other. A few miles down the road and halfway to your job, you are finally stopped by Mr. Trooper for cruising seventy-five in a fifty-five zone. He is having about as good of a day as you are where sense of humor is on vacation and the mirrored and tear-drop shades are embracing your reflection. Now you find yourself on someone else's schedule with the probability of the desired outcome likely diminished.

So, what happened?

Well, the concept of purpose drove your perspective. Your perspective drove your priorities. Your priorities drove your behavior and your behavior drove your level of success, hence, the revealing of the Pyramid of Purpose.

You see, the decision to speed to work was a foregone conclusion the minute restful sleep became the true purpose for the day's events. This led to the perspective (rationalization) that a few minutes of sleep is better than no sleep at all which in turn led to establishing sleep as the priority over anything else. And so you slept (behavior) which caused an undesired chain reaction that orchestrated an untimely citation and potentially a huge abrasion to your professional reputation (level of success).

Oftentimes, we tend to hold our decisions hostage for the outcomes of our lives. We even hold our business leaders and others accountable for the results of their decisions. Perhaps the place to start looking first is not the decision itself, but rather at the process that led to the predestined and ill-fated one.

Establish the concept of helpful purpose in your personal and professional life and enjoy the resulting decisions that will likely yield the intended outcomes. By the way… what is your purpose and how does that match to the organizational purpose and each tem member's purpose? Is there commonality? If not, work towards establishing one.

Applying the "SEE" Principle

Apply the "SEE" principle to the Pyramid of Purpose and you will have a recipe for establishing the desired outcomes where "S" = Success, "E+" = positive energy, and "E-" = negative energy. The more positive energy introduced into the Pyramid of Purpose, the higher its effectiveness will be. Converting negative energy into positive energy is the trademark of a skilled practitioner.

As energy delivery devices, EHS professionals can significantly influence the world around them. Finding the silver lining in every situation enhances the chances of success. Your desire and ability to counter negative energy with positive energy sets you apart from the pack and is valued by your leadership.

Defusing negativity can be as simple as being a good listener and walking in the shoes of the other party. Approaching negativity this way will arm you with the best strategies to implement using their perspective and your approach. A win, win.

Understanding the Second Law of Thermodynamics

The 2nd Law of Thermodynamics speaks to a term called "entropy". Entropy is a measure of disorder. The law states that everything will tend to go toward disorder if unattended, everything including your career, your safety program, your life. This means it all takes consistently applied work to maintain and even more work to improve.

An example of a situation exhibiting high entropy is a full blown riot where chaos rules and there is little to no order. An example of low entropy is military fighter jet pilots demonstrating their aviation skills at an air show.

The 2nd Law of Thermodynamics explains why your home and our bodies need maintenance and why relationships do as well. It takes work to bring something out of chaos and keep it out of chaos. Everything naturally tends to go toward disorder or a high state of entropy.

Difficult employees and managers tend to create work environments thriving in high entropy. Realizing and understanding this phenomenon is the first step in strategically aligning your plan to best counter its effects.

Conclusion

Achieving buy in from difficult employees and managers requires the following:

* A thorough understanding of how the Pyramid of Purpose predestines perspective, priorities, behavior and ultimately your level of success and that or your organizations'
* The application of the "SEE" Principle to the Pyramid of Purpose
* A thorough understanding of how the 2nd Law of Thermodynamics determines the amount of work you need to expend to achieve a desired result.

Sounds simple? It is. Be a master of finding and establishing common purpose and you will master the art of partnering with difficult employees and managers. Be a master of positive energy conversion and you will be revered for your ability to diffuse potentially harmful

situations. Be a master of understanding and applying the 2nd law of Thermodynamics, and you will be valued as a praised team member in the implementation of your safety programs.

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