Taking on the “negatrons”

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What’s a negatron, you ask? The colleague whose first response is “no,” the associate whose reaction is typically “that won’t work here, it isn’t the way we do things,” the staff member who overgeneralizes one less-than-optimal event as everything being “always bad” or “never good,” the team member who comes into the room grumpy and shows no support for the group or needed changes. I could go on and on, but I’m sure you recognize them.

The energy drain from being around negative people can be exhausting if you let it get to you. Don’t! Who has time for it in our fast-paced, dynamic world? You’re expected to be an effective, inspirational leader at all times. Let’s vow to rid our workspace of energy-sapping behavior and stay positive. We owe it to ourselves—attitude and behavior are our choice.

So how do we take on the negatrons? Your first instinct may be avoidance, but this tactic isn’t really practical and, more important, it gives too much power to the naysayers. Remember, you’re in control. As leaders, we should consider more effective approaches to actively and continuously shape our work environment into a healthy one.

If we permit it, we promote it. Engaging and redirecting the pessimists toward positive outcomes is critical. Blaming and accusing gets us nowhere and keeps the dynamic adverse. We should change the focus to how to make it work rather than why it can’t work. Keep the “what ifs” coming until there’s consensus on workable solutions. We reach higher goals and promote effective decision making when our positive energy is in charge.

Besides redirecting the conversation to the affirmative, we must provide an unassailable vision for action. Sharing in mutual, desirable goals with a team that’s determined to meet them is a compelling force to neutralize cynics. And, yes, we have to listen and ask questions to understand the behavior. Sometimes negativism is a cry for help. Exploring other viewpoints, appreciating risks, bringing out the best in everyone, advising, and coaching are what we do as inspirational leaders.

Look into yourself. Are you one of them? Sometimes we don’t realize we’ve succumbed to a detrimental attitude. Don’t let that happen. One of my colleagues has a “negative” jar on her desk. Every time she has a negative thought or makes an obstructive comment, she puts a dollar in the jar. Set expectations for yourself and your team. Don’t let anyone get away with negativism, including you.

Attitude is contagious, and a positive attitude is culture changing. There’s too much to do to waste time on the dark side. We do our best work in environments of optimism, encouragement, and even joy. Join me in taking on the negatrons. At the very least, don’t let them get you down. You’re the master of your own attitude—make it positive!

“If you don’t like something, change it; if you can’t change it, change the way you think about it.” Mary Engelbreit

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