

Combating Fear To Create Positivity At Work

Research shows that more than 70% of people, when faced with bad behavior in the office don't speak up. Research in the US suggests that only 19% of physicians speak up even when they see a colleague put a patient's life at risk.

The loss aversion theory tells us that losses loom larger than gains by almost two to one. In other words, we're twice as afraid of losing something than we are excited by the prospect of gaining something else. This leads to a tendency to accept the status quo rather than try to change things for the better.

There's always a cost-benefit analysis to be done when deciding when to speak up. Sometimes it is dangerous, and the issue at stake isn't worth the risk, but too often we allow fear to take over and make these decisions for us.

What can we do to counteract the very human tendency to avoid potential danger and learn to speak up in a way that builds relationships and leads to positive change?

Remember there is also danger in silence

Not speaking up has its own potential downsides. If you don't speak up you may be considered complicit. Your silence may also harm others, because they don't have a good role-model. By being silent you are not sharing your knowledge or experience which is probably why you were hired.

Manage your emotions

When you decide to not speak up it's often because of emotions and not what we would normally consider a decision, i.e. something rational. There are a number of ways we can get control over our emotions, but naming them is a particularly useful method of not allowing them to preside over our behavior.

Share your purpose

If your purpose in speaking up is a positive one then tell the other person. For example, you might say something like "I really want this project to be successful, so I need to tell you some bad news about the supplier we chose."

Build relationships before you need them

It's never easy to tell someone something they don't want to hear, but it is easier if you already have an existing relationship where the other person knows and has proof of your good intentions.

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