

WHY DO SOME OF THE MOST CRITICAL HEALTH SYSTEM ISSUES CONTINUE TO GO UNSOLVED?

BIG CHANGE OPPORTUNITY. LOTS OF MEETINGS. LITTLE PROGRESS.



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Recently, I arrived at the office of a client – the CEO of a large healthcare system – and was promptly warned by his administrative assistant, “Watch out, he’s on the warpath.” He had just finished his monthly staff meeting and was furious.

For several months he had been pressing his corporate staff to develop a plan for implementing a set of productivity benchmarks for his system. Months had gone by, numerous meetings had been held, and still he did not have a plan for making the tough job cuts and necessary project prioritization that this initiative required. The CEO was committed to meeting or exceeding

these standards yet the team was making little progress to actually do what needed to be done. He believed they were dragging their feet and felt he was justifiably upset with them.

Does this sound familiar? Have you observed or exhibited similar behavior; been on your own “warpath?” We all have. It is a scene that is repeated countless times a day in nearly every company and organization.

LEADERSHIP LOSES WHEN UPSET WINS

We all intend to be good leaders, adeptly balancing priorities and aligning relationships, while remaining on an even emotional keel. But under the pressure and stress typical in most organizations, breakdowns are an inevitable part of

corporate reality and usually occur when someone did not do something that you thought they should do or when something “should not” be the way it is.

It is during these breakdowns where leadership is the hardest—and is most needed. But too often, we give up our right to lead by unconsciously focusing our attention, not on the cause of the breakdown, but on ourselves.

When people are engaged in this type of behavior, they’re in what we call a “reactive cycle.” It takes place when people “react” in a conversation instead of proactively participate in one.

The reactive cycle can begin when someone says something you don’t like or disagree with. At that moment, you judge them. In a split second, you have decided they are insensitive, uncaring, selfish, dishonest, incompetent - or all of the above!

But the person hasn’t changed. What has changed is that your self-protective emotions kicked in. This happens when we feel fear, threatened, or out of control. For example,

the healthcare system CEO was afraid of the poor image of not meeting the standards that he had committed to – and felt that no one was helping him to live up to that commitment.

A person caught in a reactive cycle attempts to control the situation and the person or simply retaliates against them with their own words. The other person makes a similar reactive assessment. Their own fears kick in and you become locked a downward spiral with predictable results - you hold another discussion or meeting that produces no useful action.

HAVE YOUR FEAR AND LEAD TOO

Leaders who are able to recognize this reactive cycle when it occurs can reframe the conversation, and manage their behavior away from emotional reactions and toward productive resolutions to issues.

My CEO-client’s reasons for being upset were legitimate. But that afternoon we worked on ways for him to have his upset without it having him. By having the self-awareness to recognize he was in a reactive cycle, he could move past the emotion to address the

causes of the breakdown and begin making contributions as a leader. How?

REFRAMING: DISCOVERING NEW POSSIBILITIES

At the O'Brien Group, we work with executive teams to teach them new skills to help turn breakdowns into real opportunities for breakthrough thinking. At the core of this approach is showing individuals how to accept someone else's concern and, just for a few moments, make that concern your own. To become genuinely interested in another's viewpoint and to hold your view of the situation as only your opinion and not the truth.

We provide clients a set of verbal tools that create dramatic new pathways to action. It starts with naming the upset or breakdown and then reframing it—or shifting your thinking—in order to open up new possibilities. For example, saying to oneself:

- ***"I don't know the whole story."***
- ***"What are they concerned about?"***
- ***"How do I want this to end up? . . . What is my hope?"***

- ***"What is life calling for?"***
- ***"What can I contribute to this discussion?"***

In this way, the CEO was able to recognize his people's real fears and concerns about cutting jobs – making tough choices about good people, reprioritizing work, and the loss of their power and prestige (the result of shrinking their staffs) – and then engage in meaningful conversations to address them. He not only got the benchmarks implemented, but also was able to understand areas where their performance was setting new benchmarks as best in class.

Note that the above ways of thinking go well beyond simply asking, "What should I do?" They open up the realm of possibility; give clarity to what is needed; and foster the conversations that lead to breakthrough thinking.

Leaders work to separate feelings and actions, instead of collapsing them. They realize that they cannot be in upset and simultaneously be a leader. They reframe to change their perspective and they thrive on the rigorous thinking of others that

forces them to act, react, and fine-tune their own critical thinking in leading their organizations forward.

For more ideas on how to increase the pace, success, and sustainability of change in your organization, please call **513-821-9580** or email me at **michael@obriengroup.us**.



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