

Staying in The Driver's Seat: Workplace Happiness

by Debra Forman



Wanting to excel in your professional career is a journey of best intentions. Sadly, some of the biggest obstacles on the road to success are the ones we put there ourselves. We may sabotage our own efforts by dealing ineffectively with "blocks" that prevent us from moving forward. These blocks are created by your thoughts and sustained by your feelings. The good news is that because all their force comes from within, you can take control and drive through the barriers.

Here's the process: you think something, which causes you to feel something, and then you react or act. When the thought-feeling-action sequence is dominated by negative or debilitating blocks, the pattern takes on a life of its own.

This sounds pretty basic. If you think good thoughts, you'll feel good and then you'll do good deeds. Alternatively: think bad, feel bad, do bad. If only life were so black and white. What regularly enters the scenario to create grey is other people, deadlines, stressors, weather conditions, crises, higher stakes, challenges, distractions, bad hair days. In a word: life. So how do you stay effective?

Stay alert when driving

Staying in control of your actions is challenging in life and in the workplace. Often, by acting "reactively" to a situation, you "summon" effectiveness-hampering blocks. Yes, you are in control of your actions, but it's like driving a car with no brakes: you are responsible for driving the vehicle but you cannot bring it back onto course as you have lost control.

In the competitive work environment, you want to stay in the driver's seat when it is your responsibility to be there and to achieve an objective. This means you want to demonstrate leadership qualities and maintain a clear and rational direction. When you are sidetracked, demoted and/or pushed into the back seat you give up control.

How do you let this happen? When your actions are dominated by conditioned responses you are robbed of your effectiveness and prevented from advancing professionally or being satisfied in

your performances. Conditioned responses are like getting a shock: you find yourself in a specific situation and -- zap! --you think, feel and act in the same way each time. You become even more vulnerable when your behaviours are anticipated or predicted by others. If someone thinks you are going to act a certain way, there is a shift of power and

you lose control. In these unhappy situations, you have unwittingly left the driver's seat and are sitting passively in the back seat waiting for someone else to drive the car. When you have relinquished your seat of authority you have enabled your blocks to overwhelm you. Consequently, you won't move forward or attain higher goals.

Four Immobilizing Blocks

Here are examples of the four blocks that can effectively stall you, causing career-limiting conditioned responses:

Numbing Voice of Negativity

The first controlling block is your "inner voice" of negativity. When your conditioned response in challenging situations is under the guise and control of the Nagging Voice, your effectiveness is impeded and all you hear are self-sabotaging whispers in your ears. "You aren't smart enough," "You aren't skilled enough," "You aren't capable or senior enough." This voice paralyzes you with self-doubt. Self doubt prevents you from taking action. These crippling innuendos arm you with excuses for not pushing your limits or moving outside your comfort zones.

Me, Myself and I

A third block appears when you rely solely on your own interpretation of events. Allowing yourself the only read on a situation can cause you to misinterpret facts or misrepresent your positions on key matters. You can stunt your development when you isolate others' involvement, preventing growth of knowledge and experience. This is especially debilitating in a workplace where promoting team building and sharing are key goals and benchmarks.

Once Bitten, Twice Shy

The second difficult block is when you assume something won't work because a similar action was unsuccessful. Letting past failures dictate how you view and tackle new situations prevents you from trying again and denies you new opportunities for success. If you think the client was previously challenged with an answer you provided to their problem you may question the wisdom of stirring things up and giving an innovative solution to this latest issue, even if it is better. It seems easier to play safe. Unfortunately, when you assume that all situations follow similar patterns you prevent yourself from exploring new and improved directions.

Is Good Enough Good Enough?

The fourth block is in effect when you limit your actions or reactions only to solutions that have worked for you previously. You prevent yourself from identifying new and better solutions, causing you to live with blinders on. It is very comforting to stick with one's successes, believing there will be no surprises, confrontations or confusions. But what happens when success recedes into the past and loses its shine? Limiting your depth of vision can blind you to opportunities and insights and rightly puts your competitive edge and creativity into question.

Getting Back on Course

By controlling how you act and react to situations, you control your effectiveness as it directly relates to the situations. When you think and feel creatively and efficiently, you act and react creatively and efficiently. In using the driving analogy, when you allow your blocks to control your actions and reactions, you live as if you have crashed the car and detonated the airbag. At the crash site, your movements are out of your control.

When you shift your personal blocks and think, feel and act in a responsible and authoritative way, you will pierce the airbag and move aside any other object that impedes you from viewing a situation clearly and effectively. Then, you are able to attain your personal goals. Wanting to excel in the workplace gets you more than halfway to success. Controlling how you act will serve you well as you push down the home stretch, unblocked, and much happier.

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