

By Teri Traaen Ed. D.P.A.
August 2012

Climate and culture are the integrated and often seemingly intangible aspects to every work environment that organizations long to control and often have the most difficulty impacting for the long term. If the climate and culture of an organization have slide into levels of apathetic resistance to ethical standards and basic civil and respectful discourse there are rapid fire ways to bring about subtle and clear changes for the benefit of all involved.

The profile of bringing about change within the climate and culture of an organization includes recognizing and influencing a variety of relationship triggers, including but not limited to the following phases of personal exchange: creation of sustained conflict, use of coercion to accomplish goals, settling for only co-existence and not addressing the real issues, movement toward collaboration, high achievement in terms of full cooperation and if the optimum is reached - complete synergy (alignment at all levels even when disagreement and egos continually push the acceptable limits).

If your organization is experiencing ongoing and very dysfunctional employee relations issues (complex intractable conflict among individuals and work groups) consider the following aspects of choice making for how you might impact this situation for a positive and resolute relationship status:

1. How is the organizational climate reinforcing the acceptance of dysfunction? [This can be communicated by avoidance of an issue; passive-aggressive attacks on those who speak up and seek reconciliation even in the face of discomfort; termination of those who seek a more ethical base for the work being conducted by an organization.]
2. Is the organizational stating clearly in its business goals that resolution of employee relations issues is a top priority for all concerned? [Is this spelled out in a code of ethics for the organization and is this expectation embedded in individual department and division meetings on a regular basis?].
3. Have you taken personal responsibility for 'leadership' in areas where, within your current title/role, you can effect compromise and the findings of common ground if asked to do so among peers/work teams? [This presumes that every employee, regardless of formal title/role, is a designated leader within the organization - communicating strength through shared responsibility and accountability to each other and the organization in which they are employed].

Employee relations issues reflect the real culture within every organization. It is in the worst of times that the authentic work of leadership can be both refined and applied to move an organization beyond chaos and toward growth.