

The Social Animal @ Work

The Power of Relationship Is Key to Success

by Jon Craighead

I had a most upsetting experience recently. I was working at my desk when suddenly my computer froze. A virus had penetrated our network. This worm was so powerful that our tech vendors had to remove the infected computer and completely uninstall then reinstall the whole operating system. That process took a full day, and when the computer was returned to our office it took us another two days to reinstall all our software programs. The result: three lost work days, and not coincidentally, our vendor charges by the hour. Needless to say this was an unexpected and unwelcome disruption.

Now that we have all our systems back in working order I've had time to reflect and try to make some sense of the whole episode. I'm always struck by people who have this level of talent and technical sophistication and choose to use their skills to the detriment of others. It seems to me people who are so smart and talented could be successful and make a real contribution in a world crying out for technical expertise. Sadly, however, I think it's fair to say that the hacker is a non-social animal.

I don't want this writing to be about a curmudgeon who's convinced that the world has gone to hell in a hand basket and wanting to prove himself right. In order to make sense of the incident, I'm choosing *not* to be a victim of the hacker; instead I'm committing to use it, and others like it, to offset and mitigate the impact such behavior has on us all, particularly in the workplace. This allows me to shift from victim to someone who changes outcomes.

In his recent book, [The Social Animal: The Hidden Sources of Love, Character, and Achievement](#), New York Times columnist David Brooks points out that it's not always the smartest who succeed but more often those who have the ability to connect with people. He points to an interesting statistic: the majority of our most successful and admired millionaires had a scholastic grade point average of 2.7. Furthermore, the majority of these successful people graduated from our less prestigious colleges.

What can we take away from this? The recent magnificent studies of human psychology and the brain have allowed us to make quantum leaps in understanding who we are as a people. With what we are learning about ourselves, maybe we should re-examine our

approach to things. For example, at my former firm one of my responsibilities was to interview potential new consultants. Due to my training and orientation I focused on three primary areas: (1) their grade point average, (2) what school they attended (the more prestigious the better), and (3) their non-circular activities. Now it seems that my focusing would have better served my company if I had reversed these priorities. This is not to discount the importance of one's ability and background. All these particles make up who we are as human beings.

What has become clear to me is that the most important tool and the surest pathway to success is the ability to relate to others. How you relate to others and how others relate to you is of seminal importance in getting things accomplished. It's well understood that people who are primarily focused on themselves are not usually admired and rarely followed. You can only be a leader if others are willing to follow.

It's becoming more evident to me that our setbacks are often the greatest opportunity to move forward. As disruptive as my computer virus was, I'm more certain than ever that it takes teamwork to make any effort successful, and that an organization built on alignment, accountability and accomplishment creates an environment which nurtures individual talent but at the same time does not have talent separate people. So what's necessary then is to create a platform where everyone is respected for their contribution and all are equally important to the mission of the organization. That not only builds organizations, it builds character as well. We truly are social animals.