

Do this: Anticipate that emotional spinning may happen in unexpected circumstances and create unexpected reactions.

Don't: Try to predict the unpredictable. Just be prepared for it to happen because life on life's terms is unpredictable.

Life is change. And all businesses have changes. All changes create some loss... With either small losses or large losses, the human emotion that goes with loss is grief.

3.1.2 Change, Loss, and Grief

Life is change. And all businesses have changes. All changes create some loss. Even with gain there is loss through a change event. All loss leads to grief. With either small losses or large losses, the human emotion that goes with loss is grief. Elisabeth Kübler-Ross (1997) was the first to provide a good template to discuss the grief process. And although she focused on the extreme emotions of grief associated with death, she described a set of grieving stages, which can apply to all loss that comes from change, even small loss from small change. What most people who are not in the emotions industry do not realize is that these stages are not limited to physical death. It doesn't take a death to grieve. It only takes a change. Changes lead to the same feelings as if someone (or something) has died. The stages Kübler-Ross described are:

- ▶ Denial
- ▶ Bargaining
- ▶ Anger
- ▶ Depression
- ▶ Acceptance

Denial: The new manager instructed Annie not to use the company car until it was serviced, and to sign a new waiver before driving. Annie went ahead and used the car because she always had used it without having to ask permission. The manager reprimanded Annie. Her response was, "But this is how it's always been done."

Bargaining: When the manager repeated the policy, Annie said, "Well I'll just do it this way today, okay? And I'll pay for the gas myself."

Anger: The manager was consistent and courteously repeated the new rules. Annie reacted with, "Well this is pointless and annoying. I've always had free use of the company vehicle, and now you're telling me I have to ask 'mother-may-I' every time I have a client call me and I need to use the car?"

Depression: The manager explained the rationale for the new policy, which Annie agreed made sense. She stated, “Yeah, I can see that is a better policy for the organization, but it sure is difficult for me now that I have to re-think this entire logistics process for my project team. It was so easy before to just pop out on a client run without a bunch of paperwork and hassle.”

Acceptance: The manager supported Annie by calmly listening to her as she went through the stages dealing with this change. When Annie seemed to be more in acceptance, the new manager complemented her on her history of teamwork, and suggested she review the policy and paperwork as soon as she had time, and offered to answer any questions that might come up. Annie responded with, “Yup, we’re all in this new merger together I guess. I’ll figure it out. Thanks.”

Because the manager was aware of the stages of normal grief cycle, she didn’t take Annie’s resistance personally and was able to remain calm, focused, and supportive while Annie moved through the stages. The manager also tracked her own stages as she bumped into the resistance of Annie that was a change from her fantasy that everyone would just be easily willing to comply with her new authority. The manager noted her own emotional content, and put it on hold for the moment. She did not resist the resistance and did not counter it with more resistance and escalating emotional power plays. The resistance went away. The manager knew Annie to be a solid employee, and with the tool of understanding grief stages, actually facilitated Annie’s adjustment to a rather small change. The entire transition took only a few minutes and did not evolve into an emotional spin.

It is amazing to discover how much more receptive and non-spinning a person can be... when change responses are seen as grief responses and *not as emotional spins*.

Do this: Learn the stages of grieving and apply them to any change.

Don’t: Make the common error of thinking that it takes a death to experience the stages of grieving.

The closer a change gets to threatening control over comfort, security, or mortality, the more serious it is perceived and the more loaded with spin potential.

It is amazing to discover how much more receptive and non-spinning a person can be, and how quickly they adjust, turn to teamwork, increase loyalty and respond with open communication when change responses are seen as grief responses and not as emotional spins.

Do this: Start watching people to see if you believe they fall in the healthy, dysfunctional, or pathological categories

Don't: Be afraid of misjudging at first. Remember that the key is to not tell anyone or act on your judgments – just observe and categorize and say to yourself “Isn't that interesting,” or “Maybe that's why that is such a difficult person for me to deal with.”

Now is not necessarily the right time to confront the person because, for now, you are just going to watch.

3.5.2 Recognizing Levels of Functioning

You observe a behavior that makes you wonder if “something is up” with the employee. It makes you wonder if the person is indeed in the healthy employee category. Now is not necessarily the right time to confront the person because, for now, you are just going to watch. Use the “What's Up” Questions Checklist below to begin evaluating observable, emotional behaviors or begin thinking about feelings in the worksite. Do not ask “Why?” questions at this point in your exploration. Ask the following action questions first.

3.5.3 The “What's Up?” Checklist

What, where, when, who, how, which, how many, how often?

- ▶ Is this behavior due to a new circumstance?
- ▶ Is this behavior temporary or has it been ongoing?
- ▶ How long has this behavior been observed?
- ▶ Exactly when did this behavior begin?
- ▶ Is this behavior consistent or intermittent?
- ▶ How many people have seen this behavior?
- ▶ How many people have seen this behavior and not mentioned it?
- ▶ If this behavior escalates what might happen?
- ▶ If this behavior de-escalates what might happen?
- ▶ Does this behavior cause harm to anyone or anything?
- ▶ Is there a specific place, person or thing that is associated with this behavior?

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- ▶ Is this behavior consistent with your sense of the employee's personal style?
 - ▶ Has this behavior happened before?
 - ▶ Is this behavior in any way associated with an anniversary of some previous incident?
 - ▶ Has this behavior been influenced by outside forces or inside forces?
 - ▶ Is this behavior due to interactions with people or equipment?
 - ▶ Which performances or tasks does this behavior impact?
 - ▶ Who has this behavior influenced?
 - ▶ Is this behavior in any way life threatening?
 - ▶ If you confront this behavior, what might you anticipate as a response?
 - ▶ Is there any way this behavior could be helpful to a creative solution?

Now you know about emotions and spinning and how these impact healthy people. You have begun to think about how other people who may be in the dysfunctional or pathological ranges might deal with emotions and spinning differently, and you have seen how bullies exploit situations to create spins. In the next section, we'll look at bullies and extreme bullies in greater depth.

Questions for Further Thought and Discussion

1. After reading this chapter, can you identify some things that you are currently grieving? And if so, can you identify the stages of grief for each item?
2. Can you think of some situations you have observed in the workplace that would have been good stories to add to the ones in this chapter? To what extent would you say the upsets (or grief) involved were normal and to what extent were they a sign that one or more of the persons involved needed assistance?
3. How would a bully in your company threaten the bottom line? Can you imagine a bully's reaction to a disaster situation? What would you need to consider?
4. What strategies can you think of that would positively influence an employee who is operating dysfunctionally? What about someone who is significantly dysfunctional or moving into the range of pathology? How can you retain and empower all levels of employees, even though they may have different levels of emotional capacity?