# 6.5 Review Resistance to Training Programs

## 6.5.1 Responses from Different Types of Employees

### Healthy Employees

These can be defined as: Salt-of-the-earth, fun, pleasant, groomed, inclusive, engaged with life, open, thoughtful, manage their emotions well, open with positive and negative feelings, compassionate, reasonable, fairly consistent over time, have a life.

*Response to an anti-spin policy*: Look forward to growth and development. May have some concerns about time involved or group commitment, but eager to see the results of more clarity and definitions of policies. No resistance.

### Dysfunctional Employees

These can be defined as: Open to growth with some minor to larger fears, naive, young or old, have not been given the correct information, may be in a weakened state, vulnerable to suggestions and influences, subject to emotional swings, able to be coerced by stronger positive or negative influences, emotions are more central, may be hard workers with limited skills and options, differing levels of willingness to be taught.

*Response to an anti-spin policy:* Potential to be remediated, trained, informed, and educated. May either value or fear growth and development. Minor resistance.

### Pathological Employees

These can be defined as: Having an agenda and a mission, willing to destroy people, places and things to protect themselves or their personal beliefs and agendas, even when masked as the "greater good." They may be using individuals or the entire system for their agenda or as a legitimate cover, may target others who appear to threaten their agenda. Emotions may be central or invisible.

*Response to an anti-spin policy:* May resist remediation. May escalate their efforts, go underground, or leave. Emotional escalation is traceable to them and therefore easy to remedy, more difficult if they go underground or become covert. Once underground, they may be at risk for participating in sabotage, selling proprietary information, or other ethical violations. Early identification of these employees protects all concerned. Major resistance, which can be passive or aggressive.

### Emotional Terrorists/Bullies

*Entitlement:* "I don't have to attend, I'm too busy/important, etc."

*Bulletproof:* "I don't need this stuff. I've been here 27 years!"

*Antagonistic:* "No one else wants to come either!"

*Entrenched:* "We've never needed this before. This is over-reacting."

*Multi-talented:* "I've got other ideas that will help."

*Able to attract innocent supporters*: "Let's not go.  I'll back you up!"

*Charismatic or tragic:* "I think the company is out to get us."

*Hostage takers:* "I have a number of questions before (and while) we start."

## 6.5.2 Track the Contagion

Like a virus, emotional terrorism can spread between departments if the environment within the department has vulnerable units. For example, a harmless rumor that might be laughed off by two healthy employees may be taken seriously by a dysfunctional member of the team. That same rumor, used by someone with pathology, could be the last straw for the vulnerable employee. It helps to know who the players are, so that an unexpected invasion, such as a rumor or disruption, can be anticipated and stopped in its tracks. Knowing or defining the players does not mean anything must be done other than determining the risk factors involved in developing situations.

### Keep Trainings Consistent

Does each module of training follow the same "scripted" procedure so that the information is uniform and repeatable?

Is attending mandatory? Mandating attendance is important to create a sense of unity among participants and immediately limits options for spinning.

Do follow-up meetings provide creative input and collaboration from all members?

Has there been buy-in from the top? The top-down process allows the administration/management to discover which employees are on board, which are potential company emotional saboteurs, and which are simply trainable "problem children."

Does each module include practice time and drill for new tools, language, and concept acquirement? Adjustment and absorption of new ideas takes time and familiarity.

# 6.8 How to Write New Policies

Many organizations have infrastructure based on management policies and procedures. The procedures get things done, and the policies are the frameworks or principles to guide the flow. When things break down, policies are reviewed and rewritten. Policies are more than guidelines and less than laws; they can serve to direct system energy, block the flow, or create disruptions.

## 6.8.1 Policy Writing Guidelines

A policy is a course or management of methods and actions that guide and determine present and future decisions or practices.

There are many other ways to formulate policy, depending upon industry standards and expectations.

◗ *Some policy is better than no policy.* Policy can be a safety net or an impediment to movement.

◗ Good policy is part science and part art combining data, facts and aesthetics necessary to keep the flow moving forward.

◗ Policy is a framework so should be open and fluid.

◗ Policy incorporates ethics.

◗ An effective policy spells out the rules clearly, avoiding misinterpretation.

◗ A policy is written in clear and simple language.

Policy can be general and/or specific.  For example,

| General | Specific |
|---|---|
| No-spinning-at-the-workplace policy | No gossip policy |
| Dress code policy | No slogan T-shirts policy |
| Anti-harassment policy | No sexual jokes policy |

A well-written policy has roots and flexibility. The roots must come from the administrative level of support. These roots are absolutely necessary for any policy to withstand any winds that may come. Without this support, the policy will necessarily fail as it blows away in the dust if challenged.

Flexibility adds the bend and movement to a policy so that it does not become fixed and rigid over time. The sources of flexibility should be gleaned from the specific daily demands at your worksite or in your industry and include any cultural, ethnic, economic, or emotional dynamics that are part of the place the policy is intended to serve. It should offer protection and openness.

There needs to be enough flexibility to serve production as well as the people who perform the production. A policy should serve the bottom line concerns of the company, the community, the global marketplace, and in the best of all worlds, the planet. Policies should be living forms and not rigid statutes set in mental concrete.

## 6.8.2  How to Write an Anti-Emotional Terrorism Policy

An *anti-terrorism policy* should be strong enough to withstand an F-5 emotional tornado. That means any policy you craft needs amazing roots and an incredible amount of flexibility. When any policy is in place, it becomes exquisitely clear who the players are. Identification of players is even clearer when you are creating a policy to manage an emotional terrorist at the worksite. Emotional terrorists will offer grand and creative resistance. A strong policy clarifies the boundaries, which can set up a reactionary environment until the policy is standardized, tested, and supported by the administration.

Those employees who do not like boundaries, like emotional terrorists, will feel compelled to act, react, respond, go overt, go covert, or create spinning in others. While other employees whine and complain and inevitably either exit or adjust to the situation, emotional terrorists will escalate their agenda in order not to be bound by the rules of others. The creation of a policy often illuminates a hidden terrorist instantly when the person's resistance becomes visible. Knowing and expecting this evidence of resistance is useful if you are grounded in good theories and procedures prior to implementating and announcing new policy.

The following is an introduction to how you might start thinking how you are going to develop components for your "No Emotional Terrorism at the Worksite" policy.

### A "No-Spinning-Allowed" Policy

- Develop and define the limitations your organization is able or willing to manage if confronted by emotional disruptions from small to catastrophic.

- Demand zero tolerance for going beyond the level defined as tolerable by your organization.

- Build into the policy enough room to handle the strong human emotions of extenuating circumstances, natural disasters, man-made disasters, and unexpected events.

## A Successful Workplace Intervention

It is not unusual for a company – even one with good policies and procedures for employee conflict resolution – to call in a mental health professional for an intervention to avoid further conflict, controversy, and potential damage to reputation. In cases like the one that follows, the intervention led management to see the need for an ongoing policy and program that would prevent – or allow speedy response to – emotional conflicts.

## The Crisis

A hospital with 600 employees found itself in crisis when growing antagonism between groups of employees escalated into a public fist fight between two medical professionals. The hospital used standard methods of employee conflict resolution: HR had worked with the individuals and then had referred them to an employee assistance program (EAP), but the conflict continued. Finally, the problem came to the attention of the CEO, who – after six weeks without a resolution – initiated the action of calling in Dr. Vali to advise the company and work with management for a solution.

## The Triggering Mechanism

Dr. Vali identified quickly that the original trigger for the violence was staff response to an administrative decision to remove a vending machine from the break room. Since the hospital cafeteria was not open at night and no other food service was offered for that shift, the removal of the vending machine was interpreted as a symbol of management's lack of support for the night shift. The night shift took the vending machine issue personally, another "indicator that they were out of the loop" administratively. When they complained, they were given no alternative solutions but, essentially, were told it was a "done deal, now deal with it." Competition and bad feelings between the day shift and night shift became a system-wide "spin" and staff members picked sides, culminating in public dissension and, finally, the fist fight. Hurt feelings and a sense of administrative abandonment led to anger, petulance, and verbal abuse. The two employees from the fist fight – who represented the tension – had been leaders from both shifts on the same team for a special project. However, their different strengths and talents that had been a benefit to that project had, suddenly and unexpectedly, become the source of their division and antagonism. Other staff members took the emotional tension to heart, escalated the symbolic and literal differences, and exaggerated the issues into personal grievances.

# The Object of the Intervention

After initial interview with CEO and the ringleaders of the dispute, Dr. Vali recommended a system-wide emotional continuity assessment, since her research and interviews had revealed additional internal conflicts that had not yet reached the ear of the CEO.

Dr. Vali recommended and management concurred that the system needed to

◗   Calm down.

◗   Establish boundaries.

◗   Get back to the work at hand.

◗   Stop spinning toward out-of-control levels.

◗   Receive alternative education about emotions and business.

◗   Learn new communication strategies.

◗   Develop a policy to manage future conflicts.

Management agreed that success would be gauged via observed increased productivity and an improved level of emotional calm in the general population. The fiscal success of the program would be determined by the CFO and CEO. Finally, improvements in the emotional climate would be tracked regularly via internal systems of HR, Dr. Vali's evaluation, and feedback from employees.

# The Agreed-Upon Solution

Dr. Vali introduced a system-wide intervention to train all employees, from top down and bottom up, regarding the nature of how emotions can escalate into conflict and violence and the methods to manage and prevent the escalation of emotions in the workplace. She presented management with an overview to show how the nature of business and the bottom line can be protected while also providing compassionate support for human feelings.

After over a year of debate and delay (as described in the "obstacles" below), the administrators and the HR professionals recognized the need for a standardized plan and policy. Once the CEO was completely convinced, he was involved directly in the planning stage. Dr. Vali was available, but not involved in the direct designing of the plan. While Dr. Vali made recommendations, part of the program of emotional continuity management (ECM) is to not micro-manage it, but to empower the company to do its own homework – and make its own initial mistakes – with backup support.

## The Action Steps

◗ Mandatory classes were set for all employees consisting of a 2 hour block in rotating shifts. This was followed by non-mandatory individual meetings, support groups, and other educational opportunities, literature, and workshops.

◗ Each department received a custom-designed, peer-based approach to the special needs of their worksite and job descriptions, understanding the unique nature of each position and responsibility, stressors, and expectations for success.

◗ Every employee received education. If an employee failed to attend the assigned classes or workshops, he or she was mandated to an individual session with Dr. Vali, who evaluated the employee for resistance, emotional terrorism, or legitimate absence.

◗ CEO and top management were given additional training to manage potential adjustments to new emotional boundaries and expectations, and provided with skills training. Employees who did not wish to receive the new protocols were counseled to success or counseled toward new career/employment opportunities and ideas.

◗ During a six-month period, Dr. Vali saw 600 employees in groups of 6-10, followed up by meetings, individual consultations, and trainings. In addition, she remained on call to the company for over two years to manage other micro adjustments to the protocols.

## Difference between EAP and ECM

Part of the development of ECM is the idea that there are many possible "go-to" people and resources to manage emotional content. Often, companies do not think beyond EAP or HR for assistance in emotionally charged issues. EAP is traditionally a system that allows 3-5 sessions of counseling for one specific issue.  If the issue is not resolved, a gap in services and ongoing support often follows. Also, because EAP is designed to help individuals rather than entire groups, this support does not include the rest of the system.  On the other hand, ECM defines problems and issues spanning the entire range of human emotions, helping companies to design resources to match real problems with real solutions.  Thus, either EAP or a critical incident stress management (CISM) debriefing might offer the right support. In the process of creating policy, the hospital began to develop a broader range of partnerships for supporting employees.

## Obstacles to Success

- To begin, the administration was reluctant to change its position about the vending machine decision, refusing to replace it or offer other food solutions to night shift. This position was not flexible and, therefore, became an entrenchment.

- The company began with a compromise policy, one that was an "informal understanding" rather than an official company policy and plan. The CEO assumed everyone would comply automatically with his wishes; thus, he resisted the idea of any kind of formal company policy.

- An emotional terrorist on the staff regarded the "informal understanding" as an excuse to refuse openly to follow the steps set up for the intervention, working hard to sabotage all policies and workshops.

- The CEO had an agenda to keep this emotional terrorist on staff, which allowed the employee to continue to act out for a full year before the CEO saw that the costs outweighed the benefits and fired the employee. Only then did he support HR and the CFO to start sculpting a formal policy.

- Other delays included another violent event that was secondarily associated with the tensions in the company.

## The Aftermath

After some initial resistance, employees cooperated. Once they saw how the intervention was helping the situation, they were fully on board, and playful and a peer-based agreement ensued. Most people just wanted to get back to work and not participate in the drama. Management concluded that the intervention was worth the investment of money, time, and effort. Violence and antagonism disappeared rapidly as a result of the support and skills training. When Dr. Vali completed the intervention, the company was drafting a policy. The CEO concluded that the company was calmer and people were doing much better; so he didn't feel the need to "rush a new policy," but to take the time to develop it. When Dr. Vali spoke with the CEO about two years after the consulting contract had ended, he reported that the ECM planning continued, and there just were not "the problems we used to have."

## Lessons Learned

◗ Be prepared for the costs in money and time for a system-wide intervention.

◗ Start at the top and work down; then start at the bottom and work up.

◗ Get the CEO on board. This one struggled for over a year but eventually saw the financial reasons for the work and did a full buy-in.

◗ Have a policy and protocol in place first.

◗ Call for professional support before the conflict escalates to violence.