

Preface

When I was gifted with the opportunity to provide mental health services in New York City immediately following the World Trade Center attacks, I walked in the presence of the energetics of anguish in exact proximity with miracles. It was phenomenal. The full range of emotions present created a “Quantum Field of Sacred Ground Zero.” It felt familiar, like the openings that happen when babies are born or someone passes away, a place where something so authentic is happening that there is no missing it unless you are made of stone. A place where everything has meaning. Our work has meaning. I have had the opportunity to go to meaningful worksites that are, in my opinion, similar to Ground Zero, places where things are happening that influence the entire world. No matter where I go, I find that some employees know the meaning of their work, others just show up for the paycheck, and still others just come to cause chaos. But all of them bring their human experience with them. All their energies create the essence of their environment.

Nearly anyone who has been employed for any length of time in the real world has seen or been touched by the emotional experience of a co-worker, from a small breeze to a catastrophic tornado event. The costs to the organization range from simple to profoundly complex. Middle-level threats to well-being eat away at stamina, productivity, company loyalty, absenteeism, health care costs, mental health care costs, EAP costs, and managerial conflict-resolution time, and they just make work a toxic environment.

The event that inspired emotional continuity management:

A few years ago, a large corporation hired me to help counsel some disruptive and violent employees. Two rowdy employees had become physically violent over some work-related decision — and no one saw it coming. It was like an emotional tornado had wiped out this company and all that was left was the remnants of the former organization. Walking the halls, I saw, felt, and heard the disruptive effect created by these workers on over 600 people. It was like experiencing the rubble of any other disaster. There was no physical wreckage, but the full range of emotions was exactly like that of any natural disaster where I had served as a counselor. Nothing was hidden. Everything was exposed and raw as if a common energy had stripped away the veneer of civilized behaviors.

No one felt safe. No one felt protected. No infrastructure kept people safe in the presence of these out-of-control employees. People took sides, hid, ran, quit, overworked, underworked, ate too much, drank more, complained more, went silent, changed jobs, exited, and so forth. They reacted as if all their systems had been tossed into the air and were never going to land again. From that experience, I became sensitized to the differences between small gusts of emotions that have no power and the catastrophic force of emotional tornadoes and their impact on business.

I realized that if only this company had recognized the risk and had been prepared with corporate policies and procedures, they could have defused this situation before the human and financial costs were ever incurred. I began my research here and, as a result, I ultimately developed a corporate initiative you can put in place called *emotional continuity management*. In these pages, I provide plans and methodology you can act upon right now to avoid costs to your company in decreased productivity, injured goodwill, employee turnover, plummeting morale, and severed business relationships.

Why do the policies and practices currently in place at most companies constitute high risk behavior?

The old paradigms of separating humans from humanity during work hours is antiquated thinking and has had limited upgrades in the last few decades. While computers must be upgraded regularly, human emotional management hasn't had an upgrade. Ignoring emotions is not only antiquated, it is high risk behavior.

Historically, the work of managing emotions has been left to internal Human Resources personnel and internal or external Employee Assistance Providers. There has been a mythology that emotions are someone else's domain. Most current policies and procedures are inadequate because of 1) ignorance, and 2) resistance.

Ignorance is easily managed by offering new and efficient information that is now available by studying the concepts of emotional continuity management. Resistance is not as easy to manage due to the complex dynamics of humans who do not perceive danger even when it is in their domain. As they say, "Resistance is futile." The world is changing rapidly, and either your company can be current or it will lag behind. It isn't rocket science! It is tough to keep up and stay competitive. It is even more difficult to stay compassionate. But it is doable.

How you can use this book to start reducing risks?

- ▶ The critical first step is to understand the concept that emotions: 1) are going to happen, 2) range from small to large, 3) can influence systems (companies are systems), 4) have measurable costs associated with them, 5) can get out of control, 6) can be managed in a compassionate manner that supports people and the bottom line, 7) don't go away just because they are suppressed, ignored, or disvalued (in fact, they will distort and become even more lethal), and 8) can be turned into positive energies that support growth and development, loyalty, and buy-in.
- ▶ The second step is to achieve a realistic buy-in from those at the top of the system – meaning the CEO, the owner, the leadership – and briefly teach them the key tools. When such awareness is in place, emotions rising in the system can be reflected back into the system in a healthy format with tools that increase loyalty and strength-building aspects of the company. Managers at all levels feel supported from the top down and can manage the ebb and flow of the changes of wind velocity, knowing that if a “tornado” breaks out, supports are already in place, and if it is just a temporary emotional “dust-devil-breeze” that it isn't necessary to go ballistic!
- ▶ The third step is to teach everyone, everyone, from the bottom up, all the tools to manage emotions. No one can be left out of the trainings. No one. The primary key to emotional continuity management is that everyone is on the same team using the exact same tools, creating comradeship as well as intelligent procedures and policies. Anyone who isn't on board with the desire and ethic to work in an emotionally healthy environment can be identified easily as a risk to success. Such employees can then be remediated, repurposed, or removed. Usually, once they see that the environment no longer serves their need for chaos, they will choose to either get on board to keep their job, or move on because no one is willing to spin into an emotional frenzy with them anymore.

The next step is up to you!

Where you, your co-workers, and your employees work is sacred ground because where you work matters to you. Emotional management should not be the sole protective domain of a few employees. If everyone is awake and aware of the concepts, there can be no hidden agendas. Of course, not every company chooses to be awake – just as there are the gamblers and risk-takers in “tornado alley” who ignore the warning sirens and people who build houses directly on

top of earthquake faults. You get to decide how much risk your company can absorb. While waiting until a disaster happens is one approach to change, taking action now to reduce the risk will serve you, and it will serve the bottom-line of your company.

I keep researching, exploring, and discovering new tools that find productive and compassionate ways to mix the oil and water of finances and emotions.

Dr. Vali Hawkins Mitchell
Seattle, Washington USA
November, 2012