

WORK IT RIGHT! - #8
Improving Relationships On and Off the Job

by Gini Graham Scott

BE A PROBLEM SOLVER – THEIRS, NOT YOURS

In today's competitive, fast changing work environment, some people start thinking grievance or lawsuit, when the promises made to them to take a job or contract aren't being met by a struggling or downsizing company. Or they feel unfairly marked for early termination or retirement, say because they are earning more, are older, or have been more recently hired. Whatever the problem, a good way to think about it to keep your job or business is to see the situation not as your problem, but as your company's problem. Then, think about how to help them solve it, since if you become the answer to their problems, you may find the answer to your own.

Consider what happened to Henry, who was let go from a big company he had worked at for over 15 years. He had been a model and enthusiastic sales employee and had built up a loyal customer base throughout his West Coast sales territory. But then, the corporation based on the East Coast, brought in a new Regional Manager, Tony, and in the ensuing shake-up, Tony brought in a new younger team, and Henry, now in his early 50s, was out. Worse, Henry felt insulted by Tony's comments about his personal style, complaining that he was disorganized and abrasive, even though Tony couldn't fault Henry's good sales record.

Over the next two years, Henry simmered, as he worked on a series of temporary low pay assignments. Then, a ray of hope. He learned that the company

brought in a new Regional Manager, who was a long-term friend and hoped to rehire him. But the home office nixed the rehire, reasoning that if Henry had once been let go, why hire him again?

So what should Henry do? Ideally, he wanted his old job back, but wondered if he had the basis of a lawsuit due to age discrimination or the insulting way he had been fired. But that really isn't the way to go. Don't use a club to get rehired, you could get clubbed back in return, and it could be a long time, if ever, for you to get a job back that way. And the workplace might not be a very pleasant place to be, with everyone steamed at you about the suit. Also, if you want another job in that industry, the memory of a lawsuit, whether you win or lose, can be like a memo reminding others not to hire you, for fear you could later sue them, too.

Rather, as I advised Henry, his best shot to get his job back would be to become a problem solver and seek to help the company solve its problem as the route to solving his own. For instance, he might find out more about the corporation's current situation and what kind of workers they were looking for after a period of downsizing and reorganization. Then, he should look at ways to sell himself to them based on the benefits he could offer, given their needs. He might also determine if he needed any new training to fit in with their current direction and be ready to compromise on salary if that was an issue in these downsizing times.

In short, whatever the problem, the best approach is to focus not on past recriminations, but on future solutions. See yourself as a problem solver and think about what your prospective or current employer's problems are and how you can help solve them. Redefine the problem from how can you get a job or promotion to how can

you help your company or employer better do what they want. Then, you'll be part of the solution. Rather than selling yourself, sell benefits you can offer. Sell yourself as a problem solver, and you'll help solve your way into a job or promotion.

Today's Take-Aways:

- To solve a problem at work, look at it from your company's perspective – not yours.
- Turn your problems into opportunities by coming up with new ways to solve them with your employer's needs in mind.
- Look for the "probe" in "problems", so you probe for solutions to someone else's problems, and make yourself an essential part of the solution.

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