

Try to see employees for what they really are

I was visiting a friend, a general manager with an advertising company. Despite his senior and enviable position, I was surprised that he had nothing nice to say about anyone. “That woman there, she is a scatterbrain. That guy in the red shirt, he is a loser”. He went on and on with a shallow list of negatives about his colleagues.

In my long career of dealing with corporate executives, I have found that it's quite common for people to trap themselves into their imaginary fears, misplaced emotions and mistaken opinions about their colleagues. So severe is their judgment about people that they often isolate themselves from having a sincere and productive professional relationship with others.

I offered to help my friend. I picked two candidates whom we could observe from his cabin, and I asked him to just answer a few of my questions. “So what do you think of Rita when you see her?” I asked. “Oh, she is a hypocrite,” he fumed. “How did you observe that right now?” I pressed. “I know her,” he insisted. “Sure, but was that so obvious about her right now, that you could tell by just looking at her?” I asked. “She is disturbed about something,” he said, after an honest attempt at observation. “How can you tell?” I smiled. “She is chewing on her pencil, looking at her phone every minute and seems to have a backache with the way she is shifting around in her chair,” my friend said. I asked him to call Rita to his cabin on some work pretext. She came in with a nervous smile and seemed lost when my friend asked her about a particular assignment. She promised to look it up for him, though, and left, without making much conversation.

“If you observed the obvious, that Rita was disturbed and had a backache, is her behavior towards you and her work in sync with her state?” I asked him. “Of course, her behavior was totally understandable,” he affirmed.

The next person was Shyam. “Is there anything obvious about him?” I asked. This time, instead of giving me his opinion right away, my friend went

straight to what he could observe. “He looks like he is in a hurry. He looks under pressure,” he said. “How did you conclude that?” I asked. “The speed with which he was handing over the file and returned immediately to his desk. This is the third coffee he has gulped down without even looking at the cup. There is a constant crease on his forehead and his jaw is clenched,” my friend observed. When Shyam was called to the cabin, he hurriedly gave the information asked for and then said abruptly: “Is there anything else? Can I go now?” My friend agreed that Shyam's behavior was totally in sync with his current state of being.

So Rita was disturbed and Shyam was under a great deal of pressure. They carried their state of mind around during their work. My friend realised he only needed to deal with the fact that the behavior of his colleagues was not a personal thing. If Shyam did not want to stay and chat, it was because he was under pressure and not because he did not like my friend. Rita was disturbed and her inability to recollect the project was not an attempt to antagonise him.

The next day my friend called me and said, “Rita looks cheerful today. She came into my cabin with the full report and even apologised for the delay. Shyam looks like he has a toothache, so when I asked him about it, he was touched that I guessed he was in pain. It was so obvious.” My friend was so delighted with his new-found ability to reach out, he is practically a changed man.

When people miss observing the obvious, they form judgments about people. When you observe the obvious, you realise that people are only behaving in a certain way because of their current state of being. It's not personal. Wouldn't you become oblivious to social courtesy when you are preoccupied with your daughter's illness? If you want to free yourself of other people's baggage, observe the obvious in them. You will know how to handle them better.

Priya
Corporate trainer & best-selling author of 'I Am Another You'

Kumar