

Judy and the Jerk

By JoAnna Brandi

I was talking to my friend Judy the other day. She owns a small business here in town and has clients all over the country. We were talking about motivating employees because I have been writing a teleclass on that very topic for National Seminars (see below) and I love this energizing topic! Whenever I am working on a project I have a habit of discussing it with a lot of people to get a whole range of opinions

'Judy's entire staff is female. It can be a challenging environment at times. One thing she has noticed is that her mood, as the leader, is profoundly contagious. If she allows herself the luxury of slipping into the office in a bad mood, the day goes down hill from there. After years of running a successful design firm she's learned a few things about making sure the office runs well, so the clients have a smooth ride. Her attitude, she's discovered, is pivotal. And while that may seem to be intuitive on the surface, I have to tell you I have met many many leaders, who simply don't get that simple fact - the leader's emotional state is highly contagious. Judy will sit in the car in the morning, before walking into the office, to check in with her mood and do the best she can to adjust it to 'positive' and 'enthusiastic' before stepping through the door

If only all leaders were so conscious.

On Friday I had an appointment in the late afternoon. The person I was meeting had gotten stuck in traffic and so I sat in the well-appointed hallway outside her office waiting for her and browsing a magazine. Down the hall a couple of doors was a man screaming at his assistant because she hadn't collected some money she'd been instructed to collect. 'Screaming' may be too mild a word. Not only was his voice raised, it was raised in contempt and disdain. After repeating the same thing over, and over, and yes, over again, he tells her to send a fax immediately and then he takes a call, right out into the hall. Leaves one office, goes into another talking all the while. (Well dressed guy I might add.)

Moments later (maybe 3) he comes out of that office and back into the first. He finds that she has not yet sent the fax, which he just told her - and the rest of the office building - to send. Needless to say, he started shouting again.

Pity he knew nothing about how the human brain operated. He frightened his poor assistant half to death and then wanted her to think about what to write on the fax to persuade someone who apparently had chosen to not pay their \$13,000 invoice. Fat chance of that happening. Even I (sitting out in the hall) was under too much stress from his behavior to think creatively.

When we perceive we are in danger, the body reacts much the same way it does if an alligator approaches us while taking a walk down by the lake. The body gives us a scant few choices: fight, flight, freeze or faint. Those are the options when the primal brain takes over because we are in fear. And, as our body efficiently shuts down the systems that are not critical at the moment (like the immune system, the digestive system) our brain begins to scan for more of "what's wrong?" in the environment.

'In order to do that effectively, the front part of our brain takes a rest. The part that is responsible for creative thinking is pretty much out of the picture as adrenaline courses through our body.

'So much for a well-worded and persuasive fax.

'So back to my topic of motivation - pared down to its simplest, we can motivate with love, caring, consciousness and consideration or we can motivate with fear and its relatives: guilt, shame and blame.

'I don't know about you, but my whole body responds better to love than to fear. My whole creative self flourishes when I am feeling appreciated and cared about. And we now know that when someone is feeling a positive emotion it opens up the bridge between the two hemispheres of the brain and thinking becomes broader and we become capable of more creative and more holistic thinking. Wow.

'Moods are contagious. We can be conscious and considerate when we are aware of our impact on others (customers included) or we can go through life unconscious, unaware of how our energy and emotions impact others. While I'm the first to admit mood control is hard (after all 'moody' describes the July moonchild to a 'T') awareness of my state of mind and emotion gives me some choices.

'Most days I'm able to do what Judy does - sit quietly and still until I find the part of me that can be the most positive - and on the days that I can't I at least send up a warning flare.

'And you? Where do you fall on the spectrum between Judy and the jerk?

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