



Saying No to Negativity

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Emmet Ore

Hello and welcome, everyone. Thanks again for being here today. My name is Emmet. I'm a marketing coordinator over here at Avitus Group and we're a division partner of Vensure. I will be your host for the next hour. Today, we're going to be talking about negativity in the workplace and how to mitigate it. As always, there will be a Q&A session at the end and we'll do our best to answer all those questions. But if we don't get to them, we'll respond to those individually. This webinar today is brought to you, as always, by Vensure Employer Services. Vensure is the leader of 20 plus PEO partners with clients in all 50 states. Today's agenda includes born to be negative, why some people that are negative have tendencies to be negative, why some people are more negative than others, why negativity is bad for individuals and organizations, why positivity is good, how to stop negative thinking, how to be more positive, and how to create a positive work environment. And as always, we'll have a Q&A session at the end. So if you hear a topic we need more clarity on, feel free to submit a follow-up in the Q&A. As always, we have Robin Paggi joining us as our panelist. Robin is a seasoned human resources practitioner specializing in training on topics such as harassment prevention, communication, team building, and supervisory skills. And with that, I'll hand it over to Robin.

Robin Paggi

Thanks, Emmet. Yes, we are all born to be negative. And so, if we go to the next slide, we'll find out some more information about that. Oh, we are all negative sometimes and there's a really good reason for that. Our brain reacts more strongly to stimuli that it finds negative and our attitudes are influenced more by gloomy news than good news. Now, why is that a good thing? Well, let me give you an example. Say you're walking along a garden path and you see a snake or what you think is a snake. You're going to react to that. Your heart is going to start pounding, your body temperature is going to go up, and chances are you're going to run away from that snake or you're going to grab something and try to kill that snake. That snake could possibly hurt you. Now, I know more snakes are harmless than are not. But still, that's how our

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brain is wired, is to pick up on the negative things, or things that we perceive to be negative so that we can survive. So, our capacity to weigh negative input so heavily evolved for good reason, as I said, to keep us out of harm's way. So, we are constantly scanning the environment and the negative things, and often we don't even see the positive things. So, for example, you're strolling down a garden path and there are flowers, there are beautiful flowers, but you might not even see those flowers. That's why we have sayings that say things like stop and smell the roses because we forget to do those things. So, we're looking for it. Negative things that could harm us. Our brain picks up on them more easily and it reacts more strongly than it does. So, all of that is very good things. Our brain is designed to protect us and keep us alive. Unfortunately, negative negativity becomes a problem when it becomes a lifestyle. And we're going to talk about why that is in the upcoming slides.

Alright. Now, this part of the webinar is not uplifting, I will tell you that—and it might even make some of you a little sad. And I am sorry about that. But, it's important to understand that some people, maybe including you, have very good reasons to be negative. And the more we understand, the more understanding we can be. First of all, genetics. Now, you probably heard the phrase that some people look at the world through rose-colored glasses, which means that they're generally optimistic and see the positive things in life. Well, it's partly because of their genetics. And people who tend to be more negative, possibly it's because their genetics too. Biological variations at the genetic level can play a significant role in individual differences in perception. So, how can this be that our genetics can determine how we see the world? Well, researchers have demonstrated that numerous genes influence a person's predisposition to develop an anxiety disorder. And people with those genes who are raised in stressful environments are more likely to be fearful, anxious, or depressed. And people who are fearful, anxious, and depressed are more likely to engage in negative behaviors. So, to sum all of that up, our genes predispose us to certain levels of anxiety. And then when we have an environment that triggers that anxiety, that's what causes our genes to cause us to be more negative.

Now, here's another thing, unmet childhood needs. When we are children, we have certain needs that have to be met by other people, and even when we grow up, we still need other people. That's one of the things that this pandemic has really demonstrated, is our need to be connected to other people and what happens to us, especially those of us who are extroverted, when we don't get to have those connections. So, we're all needy. But when we are children, we have specific needs that have to be met by other people in order for us to grow up to be fully functioning adults. So, for example, we need to feel safe. Now, as adults we do, but as children, the world is a much scarier place for the most part. And children who don't feel safe often become adults who are controlling, clingy, and insecure, which can be seen as negative behavior. Children who don't feel approved of often become adults who have a compulsion to please others. Children who don't have control or autonomy often become adults who micromanage others or suffer from constant agitation or irritability. Children who lack validation often become adults who need constant praise, compliments, attention, and admiration for their looks, talents, and accomplishments. And children who don't feel loved often become adults who are attracted to unhealthy relationships, who become depressed, or have low self-esteem. And so, all of that begets negative behavior and a negative outlook on life. Now, right along with that is our upbringing. So, we can't blame our parents for everything, but here's some information. Parents who express negative emotions toward their infants or handle them roughly, maybe inadvertently harming their baby's psyche. This type of negative parenting results in aggressive, defiant kindergartners and even affects adult behavior. Children who are exposed to a parent who is negative, tend to copy their behavior and become negative themselves. And then there are medical reasons. Different types of anxiety can lead to different types of negative thinking, which then is manifested through behavior. And also, people who don't feel good, don't communicate well and are often negative.

Life events. Traumatic life events are the biggest cause of anxiety and depression, which leads to negativity. For example,

living in poverty or in an unsafe environment, a traumatic event such as terrorist attacks, school shootings, natural disasters, being harassed and discriminated against or bullied—often, serving in combat causes post-traumatic stress disorder. And this often leads to negative behavior. And by the way, today is Veterans Day. I'm sure you're aware of that. So, I would like to say thank you to the people who have served our country and to those who lost their lives and especially their family members. Our companions, you need to be careful who you hang out with, especially who you marry, the more friends you have that are content with their lives, the more likely you are to be content. And the more friends you have that are unhappy, the more likely you are to be unhappy. Why is that? Well, sadness is twice as infectious as happiness. And yes, the word infectious, it spreads. And so, just like the virus that's made its way around our world, negativity is infectious. So, be careful that you don't catch it from others and that you don't give it to others. Also, if we feel that we don't have companions, that we don't have support from family, friends, peers, that can lead to negativity as well. And our work environment, an excessive workload, concerns about management's ability to lead. So, if you think the people who are in charge really don't know what they're doing, that can cause a lot of negativity. Anxiety about job security, the fact that so many people are unemployed, our income, our 401(k)s, and what might happen with that. Our ability to retire, the threat of Social Security being removed. All of those things lead to negativity. Challenges, or the lack of challenge at work, make some people negative. And insufficient recognition. And on top of that, a pandemic and a very contentious political election caused some people to be more negative than others, especially people who are constantly on social media or watching the news. All right. So, that's the down part. Let's try to make it a little bit more uplifting with our subsequent slides. So next slide, please.

Well, before we talk about how to fix it, let's just talk a little bit more about why negativity is so bad. First of all, for an individual, if you are a negative individual and you see the world as a negative place, that perception actually makes things worse than they actually are. Or talking about negative things makes things worse than they are. And so, that's one of the things is that events are just events and our reaction to them, and our feelings about them, is what causes so much negativity. And so, when you perceive something as negative, it is negative and it makes things worse than it actually is. Negativity becomes a habit. If you've ever tried to kick a habit, you know how difficult that can be. So, for example, I'm of the generation that we were told to clean our plate, eat everything on your plate, because there are starving children in other parts of the world. It is a sin to let things go to waste, et cetera. So, if you're in a habit of always cleaning your plate, good luck undoing that habit. Smoking—good luck undoing that habit. So, we don't want negativity to become a habit because it just becomes easier, and easier, and makes life worse and worse. You get what you focus on. If you are looking for negativity, you're going to find it. And so, we're always going to find what we're looking for. If we are looking for positivity, that's what we'll find. Negativity leads to onedownmanship. So, what is this? Well, it's like when you're talking with coworkers and you go, "My supervisor is such an idiot." Your supervisor, my supervisor is even a bigger idiot. So, for those of us who like to win, we can win in the negativity department as well. Negativity makes people despondent. And that might seem like that's overly dramatic word, but it's not. And one of the reasons for that is because when our brain is so focused on negativity, it cannot focus also on hope or creativity or innovation. And that's why it kills innovation. So, the brain really has a difficult time trying to do two things at one time. And that's one of the things people think that they can multitask. And you can be typing an email and listening to this webinar at the same time. Well, our brain is just not designed to do that. It's not designed to do two things competently at the same time. And so, if your brain is immersed in negativity, it is tough to be innovative and creative, at a creative and positive because the brain just does not have the capacity to do that. And it promotes bad relationships. And so, negative people being around negative people, everybody feels negative. And one of the things when if you are hanging out with somebody who is negative, you might need to sever that relationship. I have had to do that. I used to hang out with someone and all she did was complain about everything under the sun and I just hated hanging out with her because it made me feel bad. So, you might need to sever some relationships in order to cut the negativity out of your life. Now, why is negativity so bad for organizations? Well, as you

can imagine, if you have people who are engaged in negative behaviors (and I don't like to say negative people, I like to say people who are engaged in negative behaviors) if you have those people around, you can see that they make other people despondent, that they kill innovation, that they're promoting bad relationships. It causes a decrease in motivation, creativity, productivity, and happiness, and it increases turnover. So, that's why it's bad. Let's go to why it's good or positivity is good, I should say.

Well, for individuals, positive people live longer and one of the reasons they live longer is they tend to be healthier. Now, why are they healthier? Well, when we are engaged in negative thinking and negative behaviors, it releases chemicals in our body that do damage to us. Positive people don't have that flood of chemicals in them that is doing damage to their organs. And so, positive people are healthier, they live longer, they have more friends because people want to be around them. They have better social life because they have more friends, because people want to be around them. They enjoy life more and they're more successful at work. Now, why would they be more successful at work? Because usually bosses like people who have a can-do attitude, not a can't-do attitude. And so, positive people tend to be more innovative, being more creative, be more productive, and get more promotions as a result of that. And so, all of that demonstrates why it's good for individuals. Now, you put all of those happy individuals together in a workplace and that workplace is more innovative, and more creative, and more attractive. More attractive? Positive people are more attractive than negative people? Absolutely, a positive person usually has a smile on their face and a smile automatically makes people more attractive. Just look at those two people there on your screen. Now, if they had frowns on their faces, they'd still be attractive people, but not nearly as attractive as they are now. So, attractive means that people are attracted. And it doesn't mean that someone is beautiful. It just means that people are attracted to a smile and upbeat demeanor, et cetera. So, how do we build that? How do we create that? How do we stop being so negative?

First of all, we've got to control how we think. And I know there are lots of cliches about "think positive," and some people think that that's very silly. But, there's a science behind it, and the science behind it is that when we continuously think negatively, it builds neural pathways in our brain. And the more we think negatively, the bigger the pathways and the more negative thoughts that just go through those pathways. Now, if we redirect our thoughts, then we will build different neural pathways. We continuously think positive thoughts, then that will build bigger neural pathways. And so, that's a little bit of the science behind it. So, here are some exact things that you can do. First of all, stop thinking in extremes. Now, there are some of us who are kind of dramatic, and we kind of exaggerate when we're talking because we like to tell good stories. And so, one of the things that you want to make sure that you don't do is to think in extremes. So, for example, I used to teach public speaking and it's the dreaded speech class in college that you've got to pass in order to graduate. And I would have people come up to me and they were saying, "Mrs. Paggi, I'm just going to bomb." Well, that's thinking in extremes. Are you really going to bomb? No, you might not do too well on the speech. You might even get a failing grade on the speech. But are you going to bomb? No. And so, when we think an extreme, "It's just going to be awful, it's going to be terrible. It's horrible." Then those words that we use do something to our brain. And so, it's very important that we frame things as they are. And so that's another thing about not overgeneralizing negativity is that when we're thinking, "Oh, it's always awful, it's never good." And so, that's one of the reasons that people say don't say, "never and always," it's overgeneralizing and so, stop thinking the extreme is correct. Use correct words to describe the situation. Instead of thinking, "I'm going to be awful," just think, "I'm a little nervous." Instead of, "it all is terrible," well, it didn't work this time. Don't minimize positivity. So people say, "Hey, you look great today." Do you think, "Well, you don't really mean that." And one of the things that women, in general, have a tendency to do is downplay compliments. And so, somebody says, "Oh, I love your dress." We don't go, "Oh, well, thank you." No, we go, "Oh, this old thing?" And so, there's a great skit on Amy Schumer that demonstrates that where women are just downplaying, downplaying every compliment they get. And when one woman finally says, "Thank you, I appreciate

that,” all the other women look at them in disgust. And so, don’t minimize positivity and learn how to take a compliment if people are throwing one your way.

Stop mind-reading. Now, this is something that we all do is that we think we know what other people are thinking. And usually, we think that it’s something bad and often it’s not. This was one of the things that I’ve had to learn. It’s not all about you, Robin, alright? People aren’t thinking about you. They’re not talking about you. The world doesn’t revolve around you. And so, that’s the mind-reading. So, don’t put what you think other people are thinking in your brain, and what they’re thinking is none of your business. And that’s one of the phrases that I think Eleanor Roosevelt said that I really like, “What you think about me is none of my business.” Stop taking all the responsibility, unless, of course, it is all your responsibility. But sometimes things will go wrong at work. “Oh, it’s all my fault.” Things go wrong on the team. “It’s all my fault.” Unless you’re at the top of the food chain, it’s probably not all your fault. So, don’t take the responsibility if you don’t need to. Stop forcing your own rules on life. Now, we all have our rules for behavior. Some people have more rules than others. So, I was doing training and a young man had moved to Bakersfield, California, where I live, from the Midwest, and he said it personally offends him when people change lanes in front of him without putting on their blinker. And I said to him, “Sir, people barely stop at red lights here, so you’re going to be personally offended all the time now.” Yes, we should put on our blinker. It is the law and we definitely should stop at red lights. But, we all have rules that we think everybody else knows. And if they’re not playing by those rules, then something is wrong with them, and it irritates us, and agitates us, and causes us to say things, and do things that if we just let it go, it wouldn’t be that big of a problem. Now, you can’t let everything go but really pick your battles and then stop making stuff up. So again, when something happens and we don’t know the reason for it, we tend to make things up. That’s one of the reasons that I tell employers and supervisors tell employees as much as you possibly can about things that are going on because people need to have information. And when they don’t have information, they make it up. And usually what they make up is way worse than what is actually happening. So, look for answers, don’t make up answers, and believe those things to be true so those things can help stop negative thinking.

That’s not the end of what we need to do instead of just stopping these things, we need to do other things and what we need to do is to be more positive. Now, one of the things that you need to know is that our words create our reality. So, you need to be careful about not only the words you say but the words you think. Negative words again, shut down innovation, creativity, all of those types of things. Positive words and thoughts propel the motivational centers of the brain into action. They stimulate the brain. And when the brain is stimulated in a good way, then all sorts of good things can happen. So, if you want to develop lifelong satisfaction, you should regularly engage in positive thinking about yourself. Share your happiest events with others. And I don’t mean all over Facebook, and look at how fabulous my life is, or bragging, or gloating, but just with your family members. Talk about memories that make you very happy, talk about things that happened in your day that make you very happy, and savor every positive experience in your life. So, you want to focus on the positive. Now, people who have been there, done that, and wrote the book about it, said that the balance is five positive thoughts for every one negative thought. Now, remember, negative thoughts have a huge impact on us, and the reason for that is because it gets our fight or flight system going. And so, again, remember that snake? We see a snake, the heart starts pounding, our adrenaline starts flowing—all of those things happen. That doesn’t happen when we see a flower. So, we need to have five positives for every one negative in order for us to be balanced. If we say something negative, it takes five positives to balance that out. Now, I want to give you an example of how this works. I have an aunt, and when I was younger, she was my favorite aunt. But as I’ve grown up, especially when I’ve become an adult, our political differences became apparent. And like a lot of people in the last eight years or so, those differences begin to create a wedge in our relationship. But it wasn’t just the fact that they were different. It’s that my aunt had a tendency, especially at family gatherings, to bring things up and order to irritate me. And I’m not making that up. I know it’s true because at one family event when she kept poking at me about things, I finally said to her, “Do you talk to everybody like

this, or is it just me?” And she said, “It is just you because I know how it irritates you.” Okay. So, you see, I didn’t make that up. Now, I was extremely hurt that my aunt would do that. And I think maybe she just thought she was joking around with me or something. But seriously, it put a damper on family events for a while. And so, I came home from that particular family event where she told me that she was just trying to irritate me and I was in this negative spiral. And that’s what happens to us. Sometimes we begin to ruminate on things. It’s like we’re a hamster and we get on our hamster wheel and we just spin, and spin, and spin, and we just think the same thoughts over, and over, and over. And we can’t get off that hamster wheel. And so, that’s what was happening with me. Now, fortunately, at that time, a client had asked me to create this presentation for them. And so, I thought to myself, “Hey, why don’t you try that five positive thoughts thing and see if it actually works?” And so, I did. And these are the thoughts that I had about my aunt. She made me feel safe when I was a child. Now, we’ve talked about how important safety is for children, adults, too, but especially for children. And my family life was a little chaotic. And when my aunt would come and pick me up and take me to her house to stay the night, I loved it. I just felt so safe with her. One time we were shopping and I found a little jewelry box that when you opened it, a little ballerina spun around to some music. And I fell in love with that jewelry box. I just had to have that jewelry box and she bought it for me. Now, that made me happy as a child. But when I became an adult, I realized the circumstances that she was in. She was a single parent. She had three children. She was having a tough time buying gifts for her own children, much less her niece. And so, then I really understood the love behind that gesture. We hung out when I was a young adult. We’d go to plays. We do all sorts of things. She was just fun to hang out with. She left her home and moved into my grandmother’s home after my grandfather died. My grandmother was suffering from dementia and my aunt left her own home so that she could take care of my grandmother and so that my grandmother could die in her own home. And dealing with dementia was a very difficult thing while she was still working. And then finally, my aunt is my dad’s sister and my dad has done a lot for his family and he hasn’t gotten a lot of recognition for it. And one time at a family event, my aunt told my dad that she knows how much he’s done. That he’s the rock of the family, that the family could not survive without him, and that made my father happy, which made me happy. Now, after I thought about those five things, I could get off that hamster wheel. It didn’t mean that I wanted to talk to my aunt that much, it just meant that I could recognize that this little thing that irritated me was not as big as the rest of the things, and I could let it go. So, that’s what we can do for ourselves, five positive thoughts for every negative thought, five positive statements for every negative statement. And if you don’t want to say positive things, then don’t say the negative thing.

Now, what you can do to create a more positive work environment, especially if you’re in a supervisory position. First of all, I think the number one leadership principle is to lead by example. If you do what you want everyone else to do, chances are they will do it. Employees are much like children. They follow the leader. And so if you’re negative, they’ll be negative. Well, what if you’re not in a supervisory position? You can still lead by example. If you want people to be positive, you be positive and don’t allow anyone to be negative around you. And then that will help. Now, if you were in a supervisory or leadership position, increasing the ability for input, one of the things that makes employees unhappy is when they feel that they cannot express their concerns, or when they do express their concerns, nobody does anything about it. Employees are unhappy when no one asks for their ideas, for what they think about things. And so, invite people to talk to you if you’re in a supervisory or leadership position that will help people feel included. Now, of course, don’t just pay lip service to it. Don’t just say I welcome your input and then don’t do anything with it, because then that will cause them to be negative. And as I said, respond to employee concerns—let them know that something is happening when they express a concern. You don’t need to tell them exactly what is happening, but just let them know that you’re working on things and that you’re going to tell them what you can tell them about that, treating people with fairness and consistency. Obviously, people want things to be fair. And that’s one of the biggest lessons we have to learn when we are young, is that life is not fair. And even as adults, sometimes we have a difficult time with that. But in the workplace, things are supposed to be fair and consistent. Inconsistency breeds contempt. And so, people who play favorites aren’t being consistent and aren’t being fair.

People who hire certain people but won't hire others are not being fair. And by the way, that's against the law. So, all of that and transparency is important. Don't use the shotgun effect. Now, what this means is that if you have something to say to one employee, say it to that employee, don't say it to everyone. So here's an example. You have an employee who's late. And instead of going to that employee and saying, "I've noticed that you're late, is there a reason for you to be late? You need to be to work on time." Instead of going to that employee, the shotgun effect is that you send out an email that says, "Just want to remind everybody that we all need to be at work on time." Now, that is not fair. That's not fair to the people who are always at work on time. And it will make them negative. And it's not fair to the person who needs the feedback either, because chances are it'll go right over their heads. So, don't send a message to everyone if only one or two people need to hear that message. And then again, explain your actions. Try to be as transparent as you possibly can. "We're implementing this new policy and this is why we're implementing this new policy. I have made this decision and this is why I've made this decision. We're going to make a change and here is why we're making the change." As much as you can explain your actions. If you don't explain them, people will make up the reasons for them. And usually, the reasons are much worse than the truth. One of the things that is important to do is to talk to employees about their negative behavior. And so, again, you don't want to send out an email to everyone that says we all need to be more positive. You need to talk to the person themselves. And so, I want to give you a little format and then I'll tell you how it sounds in real life. First of all, you want to meet with the employee privately and do the following. Tell the employee about the negative behavior that you have observed or that you've heard about. Explore what might be causing the negativity. Sometimes people have really good reasons to be negative, as we've discussed. Now, if it's because of a legitimate work-related issue, the conversation goes in a different direction. But, if you say is there a reason that you're engaging in this negative behavior and the response is, "Well, this is just the way I am," then you continue with what I'm telling you. Next, explain the impact of the negative behavior on others and the need for change. Create and agree on some strategies for change and then follow up with the employee. Now, when I am coaching employees who are sent to me in order to improve their interpersonal skills, this is exactly the format that I use. We talk about why their behavior is not working, what they might need to do. Instead, we create strategies. They go off and implement those strategies, and then they come back and we talk about the results. So, all of that would sound something like this. Let's say that I have an employee and I say to that employee, "I want to talk to you about something that's concerning me. I don't know if you're aware of this, but you frequently make disparaging remarks about your coworkers. For example, in our staff meeting yesterday, you told Steve that his degree would mean something if he had gone to a real college. You told Don that the eighties called and want his suit back. You mimic the way Sally talks by saying the word like at the beginning of every sentence. And that was just in one meeting. Are you upset with your coworkers about something? No, then you need to know that those kinds of remarks are causing your coworkers to not want to work with you, and I need everyone to work together. I'm not saying you need to change your personality. I am saying you need to refrain from making fun of your coworkers. Let's meet next Friday to see how your week went, okay?" So once again, it is exploring why somebody might be so negative, determining what they could do to not be so negative, and then following up with them. And the follow-up is really important. Just having one conversation about something, that usually does not do the trick. So, I want to end by saying that the words we use create the world we live in. Be careful about what you say and even what you think. If you continuously think negatively, that builds neural pathways to encourage more negative thinking. Redirect your thoughts, change your thoughts, and you change your world and the world that the people you live with and work with live into. Alright, now we can go to some questions.

Emmet Ore

Thanks, Robin. First question here is, "can you suggest how to steer away from a negative conversation?"

Robin Paggi

Yes. When somebody starts going down the negative route, then you just might say to them, "You know, I really don't want

to talk about this. So can we change the subject?” Or, you can if you’re in a group of people, just say, “Sorry, I’ve got to go.” So, one of the things that you can do is just bring to light, especially now people are trying to be more positive to try to not engage in negative behaviors, not post nasty things on Facebook, not engage in negative talk, and so especially now it’s the perfect time to just tell people, you know what, I just don’t want to do this. And so, can we just change the subject? So, hopefully that will help.

Emmet Ore

Great. How do you know if you’re being too negative?

Robin Paggi

Yeah, there is a nice little checklist that you can go down into, so I’ll give you some ideas. And if you think you’re guilty of a lot of these, then chances are you might be too negative. So, first of all, one is that you frequently complain about things. Now, we all complain about things at times and we should because complaints often bring about better things. So, if it’s a valid complaint, then go ahead. But, people who are too negative, again, they can’t find the positive in things. And so, they only talk about the negative things. So, they’re complaining about things constantly. Also, if your mind is tuned to noticing flaws and so whatever you see, you’re going to see the flaw. So, if you look at a painting, you see a flaw in the painting. If you look at a report, you see the flaw in the report. Now, some of us, our brains are geared toward finding the flaws, and that’s just how hard our brain is wired. And if you’re in a job where you need to do that, that’s great. For example, my husband’s an auditor. Auditors need to find the flaw when they look at something. And so, that’s great. But then, if that’s all you do is find the flaw in the rest of your life, then that’s no good. So, if your mind, if you experience something and the first thing that you can think of is what was wrong with it, then you might be too negative and even small flaws ruined things for you. And so, it’s not exactly perfect. Okay, then it’s ruined. So again, it’s that all-or-nothing thinking that extreme thinking. If there’s a tiny flaw then we have to throw it out. It’s no good. That might mean you are too negative as someone suggests something and you’re quick to point out why it won’t work. So again, some personality types, they can see what’s not going to work. And when they try to point those things out, it’s because they’re trying to be helpful. The problem is when if you see something and you don’t really need to say something about it, but you really want to because you really like when you point out the flaws, then that’s a problem. I used to train a group of supervisors once a month and we did this for probably 16 months. And there was a woman in this group of supervisors who, that was her thing. She loved to point out the flaws and she would just get a big smile on her face. And you could see how excited she was to point out why something would not work and nobody liked her as a result of that. And so, that’s one of the things to know if you’re too negative also is that people don’t want to be around you. They don’t want to talk to you. People who are engaged in too much negative behavior like to tear something or someone down. They love to put people down. It just makes them feel better about themselves. And certain aspects of the world get under their skin and they just have to rant about it. And that’s all they talk about. And if something is going well, you’ve got dozens of reasons why it’s not really that good or probably won’t work out well. And mostly you think that positive people are naive. They don’t live in the real world. They have low standards. They’re impressed too easily. All of those things. So, chances are you’re guilty of some of that. The problem is when that’s your lifestyle and if you frequently complain, you point out the flaws and things you like to tear people down. You rant and rave about things that are a problem for you. You can come up with all these reasons why things won’t work and you think positive people are kind of stupid. Chances are you need to do something about it, not only for yourself, but for everyone in your world.

Emmet Ore

Here’s another question. What if there’s a person who is constantly negative, and rude, and constantly puts people down? My boss sees it and does nothing.

Robin Paggi

Yeah, that's difficult because if the boss allows it, then there's not much you can do about it. But, what I would do, and again, this is my personality style, I am open to talking to people about things I don't shy away from difficult conversations. And so, for someone like me, what you might want to do is to talk to that person privately and just let them know that these are things that I see and this is how it's affecting people. Or at least, you know, chances are that negative person won't care, especially if the boss doesn't care. So, in that case, having a conversation with that person might be futile or it might not get you the results that you want. In that case, you just have to protect yourself from the negativity. So, one of the things that you can do is when somebody says something or that person says something negative, you can say something positive. So, if that person were to say something like, "Oh, Robin's webinars sound so preachy," and you could say, "Yes, but we get lots of really good information from them." And so, any negative thing they say, say a positive thing and they'll probably get tired of saying their negative things after a while. So, you protect yourself with positivity. And again, one of the things that you can do is to consider all of the reasons that people have to be negative and what that person might be experiencing or have experienced in the past that causes them to be negative. If that person berates people because they did not get the accolades they needed as a child, then try that route. And so, you've heard the phrase kill them with kindness. That's what that means. And so whatever negative stuff they've got coming out, you put your positive shilled up and give them positive stuff and see if that doesn't help them. If nothing else, it'll make you feel better.

Emmet Ore

Okay, how do you recommend I approach a supervisor who is not polite and does not accept or acknowledge that he may not be polite?

Robin Paggi

So, again, I think that the answer I just gave is the same, and in every situation, if you are going to talk to or if you experience someone who's engaging in negative behaviors, you have choices to make. One is to talk to them about it. And when you're talking to them about it, again, you talk about what you've seen, what you've experienced, the impact you think it's having on people, what they might do instead. And when you are having these conversations, you don't, your attitude and approaching this person is crucial, it needs to be helpful, you want to help them, you want to help the organization. If you're sounding preachy or judgmental or something like that, it's going to turn people off. So, your attitude going into it should be, "I want to provide you with some information that I hope will be helpful to you. When you made this remark in the staff meeting, it hurts somebody's feelings, et cetera. And I think you would be much more effective if you would have those conversations privately," or things like that. So, again, if you try to be as helpful as you possibly can when you're delivering the information, it might be received. However, chances are that people will not be able to accept any kind of feedback, no matter how helpful or well delivered. And so, again, you try, and then you do what you can to protect yourself from the negativity.

Emmet Ore

Great, thank you. Where would you define the line between being negative and being realistic?

Robin Paggi

I think that the line is that realism can point out that the situation is not great, but focuses on what to do about it. Negativity just points out that things aren't great and leaves it there. So if you point out there's a problem, have a solution. And/or maybe if you can't come up with a solution, at least you're trying to go in that direction. So I think, yeah, we can all see lots of things in the world that are terrible and we would be unrealistic if we pretend that they don't exist. But negativity is when we just shrug our shoulders and say there's nothing that we can do about it. And so, I think that's the line.

Emmet Ore

Got it. Okay, how do you deal with employees who cannot take any corrective suggestions and claim you're being mean and micromanaging?

Robin Paggi

Yeah, well, one of the things is, first of all, are you micromanaging? Because you might be. Now, we tend to see ourselves in the best light, which is ironic because we also can beat ourselves up better than anybody else can. But we might be, we might think we're being helpful when someone else thinks that we're micromanaging. So first of all, when you get feedback like that, really examine it to see if there's any truth in it, examine your behaviors and what you might be doing that would make people have that feedback because that's when feedback really gets helpful, as you can learn and grow from it. But, the other thing to recognize is that how you're delivering the feedback might not sound helpful. And so, examine yourself first and then if you need to make any changes, do so. But focus on the fact that once again, people tend to get defensive when they hear things about themselves that differ from their perspective of themselves. And so, you want to focus on not the people themselves, but on their behavior or the tasks that they're complaining about or that type of thing. So, instead of saying you're really not a morning person, are you? You would say something like when you come in, in the morning, and people say good morning to you, you frequently don't say good morning back, which causes them to feel discounted. And so, I encourage you to say good morning to your coworkers. You'll be much more effective with them and make their day better, etc.. So, you're just focusing on behaviors, not on people's personalities or faults or things like that, and you're providing them with information that they can do something about and that is helpful for them. And you focus on the fact that you want them to be successful, and that's why you're providing them with that information. And when you do all of those things and again, your attitude, when you approach the situation, you want to make sure your language is accurate, that you're accurately describing the things that need to be improved, that you're telling them how to improve, that there are things that are under their control that they can do and that ultimately you want them to be successful. And that's why you're having the conversation. When you do all of that, it helps in your efforts to have them actually hear what you're trying to say.

Emmet Ore

Excellent. Here's another one. What do you do if your boss is too negative?

Robin Paggi

Yeah, so I think this is the same answer again, is that you try to help your boss as much as you can by managing up. And so, that is when the boss says something negative, you say something positive, or you would try to put a positive spin on things, just basically what I've said before. But again, when your boss is too negative, especially, you've got to protect yourself from that negativity. And so, don't believe everything that the boss has to say about you or other things. If you can't put a happy spin on it to your boss, do it to yourself. Recognize there are probably lots of reasons that your boss is negative that you can't fix, but at least you can be understanding about it. And so, it's really important. As I said, negativity is infectious and we need to protect ourselves. We need to have a vaccine of positivity so that we are not infected by the negativity. We can't change other people. We can change how we respond to events that happen in our life and what we think about those events. And so, if you've got a boss who is too negative, then what you can focus on is their positive attributes, what they really meant to say, whatever feedback they give you, that you try to learn from it and to study what they do so that when you become the boss, you won't behave like they do and cause other people misery.

Emmet Ore

Okay, you may have already answered this one sort of, but I'll ask it anyway. Do you have any recommendations on how to gently let someone know you've noticed that they're being negative a lot?

Robin Paggi

Yeah. And so, again, saying to the person, and I know I said this, but I think it bears repeating because repetition usually helps us remember things. You say to somebody such as Emmet, and I'm totally making this up, Emmet, "You know, I've noticed that you have a tendency to make disparaging remarks about people during meetings and after meetings. And I just wonder if something's bothering you that would make you feel this way, or I just want to let you know that I think that it's doing yourself a disservice by doing this because people are starting to have negative thoughts about you," or something like that. So, again, it's just it's trying to point out specific examples. It's trying to determine if there's a good reason for the negative behavior, trying to come up with some solutions. Or first of all, you talk about the impact that the behavior is having and then try to come up with some solutions that people can implement in order to get rid of the negative behaviors. And so, it takes a lot of planning on exactly what you're going to say. Don't do it just winging it like I did just now. You want to plan what you're going to say, when you're going to say, where you're going to say it, how you're going to say it. All of those things should be taken into account. So, any time I deliver a message, especially one that I think that people are going to be resistant to, I think about the response that I want from them and then how I'm going to get it. And so that's the planning that goes into it. Who or where, when, how, all of that. And so, when you really do that, then hopefully you'll get the result that you need. But chances are you won't. And if people don't give you the immediate response that you're hoping for. Just know that maybe later on they will because any time we pick up on a negative threat, such as feedback, we tend to react negatively in defensive mode. But later on, after things have cooled down, sometimes we think about it and that's when you get the response.

Emmet Ore

Excellent. Well, I think that is a perfect place to wrap it up here. Thanks, everyone, for your questions. Thanks, Robin, for your time. And we'll see you all next week.