



## **PEACE IN THE WORKPLACE**

*A Column by Marianne Farag*

*Based on "Achieving Performance Through Peace in the Workplace", Public Sector Management, Volume 26, Issue No 1, 2015*

### ***The Power of Habit: Make Peace Your Habit at Work***

From the moment the alarm goes off in the morning till the moment we get into bed at night, our lives are governed by habit. The steps we take and the order in which we take them to get ready to set-off for work, what we do immediately when we arrive at work, where we eat lunch, how we conduct ourselves in meetings and interactions with work associates and supervisors, our final steps when we get ready to leave work, how we spend our after work hours, how we communicate with our children, family and friends, all take place in a habitual way. Which means, they are routine. We don't have to think about them, they come to us automatically.

Think of how much conscious thinking and mental processing you go through when you learn something new like driving a car or a new computer software program, or the rules of a game or the steps to a dance, or a new procedure that is to be followed in your work. Through repetition and practice, that which was once new and required mental effort, over time, becomes automatic. Ever had the experience of driving somewhere and once there you wonder how you got there?! Yes, you were paying attention to traffic signals and road signs, but it felt so automatic and you did it while perhaps reflecting on something, or paying attention to a radio program, or conversing with a passenger.

A habit is a routine or behaviour that is repeated regularly, and tends to occur unconsciously. At one point in time, a habit is a choice you make (like having a muffin every afternoon, or jogging at a certain hour of the day), then you stop thinking about it but continue doing it, on a regular basis.

### **Habit in the Workplace**

In the context of the workplace, you may be shocked to learn that everything you say and do, and how you mentally process the communication and behaviour of others, is absolutely a matter of habit! Every habit/behaviour is preceded by a trigger. In and of themselves, triggers are neither 'good' nor 'bad'. Rather it's our reaction to them (depending on whether they push our buttons) that determines how we respond. For instance, while one person might react to a frustrated employee who is struggling to understand something as a trigger to be helpful, in someone else, it might be a trigger to react impatiently.

Although we are creatures of habit, the good news is we can choose to change our routines. Ask yourself, are your current workplace routines creating tension, conflict and disagreements? Does it feel like you are winning daily battles (short-term superficial results) instead of winning the war (long-term lasting results)?

So how exactly can you go about cultivating peaceful habits at work that yield enduring positive impact?



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### Become Aware of Your Triggers

Self-examination and self-observation is a good first step to become aware of your triggers. Challenge yourself on why you react negatively to certain triggers. Delve into your stress triggers to identify what makes them stressors.

### Set Goal, Have a New Habit Plan, and Rehearse

Before you can change a habit, you need to articulate your goal and a plan of action. For example, if your goal is to be open to exploring the ideas brought forward by team members instead of dismissing them from the get go, write down all the steps you will take to put this new habit into practice including how you will deal with moments that you know are likely to be difficult for you to resist the urge to be dismissive. The act of writing down plans enables you to think through the points at which you might quit/give up and how you could overcome this and persevere.

Apart from developing a habit plan, it helps to practice through role-play – i.e., rehearse so it becomes second nature when faced with the stress trigger. What you are essentially doing is choosing a certain behaviour ahead of time, and then rehearsing it with yourself (like you would a presentation you are going to deliver), so you are more likely to put the new habit into practice even when a trigger occurs.

### Practice Self-Discipline

At first it may be a struggle to stick with a new routine. It will take time; there will be lapses, but self-discipline and a willingness to keep trying are the only way that a new pattern can eventually replace the previously imbedded impulses.

### The Catalytic Effect of The Peace-Habit

Changing unhelpful routines brings meaningful improvements in the quality of your workday. By learning new routines, you empower yourself to take control of your peace in the workplace. This in turn starts a chain reaction of spillover benefits: everything from less reliance on Roloids and donuts, to being more productive, to being in a better mood, not to mention the potential for influencing behavioural changes among co-workers.

A useful resource to help you explore this subject further is: *The power of Habit* by Charles Duhigg.

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