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Don't take it personally: Five steps for success

When you take something personally, for the most part it means you are internalizing information as part of yourself rather than as something that may really be about the other person. You may be sensitive to the words or actions of a customer, colleague or supervisor. Perhaps someone says something or behaves in a manner you interpret in a negative way. Slowly but surely, taking things too personally can make you miserable, lead to high levels of stress and possibly take a toll on your career.

Let's take a look at five steps that are positive strategies for not taking things personally. They have worked for me. I hope they will be helpful to you as well.

- Take a deep breath. You may laugh at this, but I assure you it works. Focus on taking deep breaths for a moment or two because that may be all the time you have. This technique helps you calm your mind and body down at least a little bit. It also puts some space between you, the other person and what has just happened and enables you to respond more effectively in the situation. Try it!

- Get clarification. Henrik Edberg, author of "The Positivity Blog," says, "Don't jump to conclusions based on what you may have just misunderstood ... Instead, ask questions if possible to help clarify a bit about what the other person meant." Keep in mind we all have different perspectives and ways of

communicating. Plus, the misinterpretation may be a reflection of the other person's issues they are experiencing. They may be having a bad day, going through a rough period, or it may simply be their temperament. Furthermore, tone of voice and nonverbal communication can play a major role in the cause of the overall confusion. So be sure to clarify!

- Take a different perspective. Fay Agathangelou, author of "Building Self-Esteem Blog," tells us, "Ask yourself how an unbiased outsider would see the situation. Are you misinterpreting the reality and is it really as bad, or as negative, as you perceive it to be? Another perspective is to put yourself in the other person's shoes and imagine how they would see it." Consider this situation: Several years ago, when I was providing phone etiquette training for an organization that recorded all of their calls, there was a customer service issue where the customer was extremely irate, cursing, yelling, etc. In response, the employee handling the call responded in kind. Long story short, the customer eventually calmed down on her own and apologized to the employee, who then discovered in their discussion the customer had just received news that morning that she had terminal cancer. This is a shining example that in so many cases, you do not know the other person's circumstances. Although you can't control other people's words and ac-

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tions, you can control yours. Take a different perspective!

- Control your emotions. Learn to control your emotions rather than letting them control you. Emotions play a major role in who we are, but they are not a substitute for rational thinking or rational problem solving. Bear in mind rational thinking helps to calm us down, get us centered and keep us from taking things personally. Control your emotions!

Humor can be a great softener for so many situations life sends our way.

- Nourish your sense of humor. Humor can be a great softener for so many situations life sends our way. Used timely and appropriately, humor and laughter can get the endorphins flowing, make all parties feel better and alleviate the tension that can be another cause for taking things personally. Nourish your sense of humor!

The bottom line is by learning and practicing these steps to success for not taking things personally, you can enhance the quality of your life, reduce your stress level and enhance your ability to effectively engage with others both personally and professionally.

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