

Why Course Correction is Counter-Intuitive

Much workplace drama could be eliminated by course-correction. However course-correction is difficult for many reasons. First, there's the need to be right, and second, course-correction is often counter intuitive. Besides the need for air, water and sleep, the biggest psychological need for most of us is to be right. Think about how difficult it is to apologize and admit you were wrong when you were so certain you were right. Or think of how humbling it is to admit your plans and direction didn't work in front of your employees, boss, or co-workers.

Second, course correction is often counter-intuitive, therefore real course correction involves awareness, the willingness to be wrong, and the knowledge of how to course-correct. This post gives some common examples of how course-correction is often counter-intuitive.

Angry Customer: The first response is to defend, prove them wrong, or avoid.

Course Correction: Listen compassionately, ask for more information, so you can seek resolution and exceed customer expectations.

Guilt Trip Trap

Most of us when manipulated by guilt will give in to please the other person, or we withhold information or walk on eggshells in an effort to avoid the manipulation and bad feelings to come. (I'm mostly thinking of family relationships where there is a hidden message of "After all I've done for you and you had the nerve to do XYZ..." but the Guilt Trip Trap is alive and well in the workplace too, especially family owned businesses.

Course Correction: Confront the tactic by questioning uncertain motives. Seek to understand the feeling tone beneath the sarcasm, the innuendo or the manipulation. Example, "It sounds like you are upset with me. What's up?" Chances are they will deny the manipulation but because you addressed it and didn't give in chances are the manipulation will eventually decrease. If they do come clean about the real issue at hand you can facilitate a responsible communication to come to understanding.

Ineffective Employee

You have an employee who isn't pulling all of her weight but she's got seniority, and you just don't want to rock the boat. No one ever gets fired at this company anyway.

Course Correction: You have to have a difficult conversation. You must own the part you played in letting it go on for this long. Then you have to put some accountability measures in place or else!

Queen Bee

You have a Queen Bee employee. She's very effective, and she's a top performer, but she's also a bully. The impulse is to make excuses for her, and avoid looking at the problem. After all, you can't afford to lose her. Your work load would double and your revenues would decrease.

Course Correction: This type of course correction may be complex. You may have to work through the politics, you may have to change the way commissions are given, you may need to work on policy. Once something unacceptable has been allowed, there are many skills needed to navigate through the change.

Negative Co-Worker

Negative people drain your energy and in the workplace can impact your personal effectiveness. The impulse is to fix their problem, give advice, or hide.

Course Correction: Learn how to be present in someone else's negativity without encouraging it, taking it on or fixing it. A mind-set habit is to repeat to yourself, "This belongs to them, not to me."

If you aren't getting the results you want, here are the steps:

1. Awareness.
2. Seek expert advice.
3. Create a plan for course correction.
4. Practice until you get back in alignment.