

Self-Management is Critical for Handling Problems

By Julie Fuimano, Personal Development Expert & Success Coach



A staff member doesn't handle a problem with a customer well, and you, as the manager, are upset. You think to yourself, *"Why on earth would he do such a thing? Doesn't he know better? He should know that's not how to deal with a customer!"*

Your young child is playing upstairs. You decide to go and check on her and discover that she's been drawing on the wall. "Look at my beautiful picture!" this small face smiles up to you. You, of course, are enraged and think before responding, *"Haven't I taught her not to draw on the wall? Doesn't she know better?"*

There are probably thousands of examples of these moments, moments when you think *"What would make someone do that?"* It is at this very moment when we reach a fork in the road and quite often, we get stuck. The stuck point is the assumption that the person knows better. This is the expectation. You have an expectation for how an employee should behave, how your children should behave, how things should function, even how you should be and what you should do. These expectations sound like "shoulds".

Unmet Expectations Are a Great Source of Stress

Expectations in and of themselves are not bad. We need to have some direction, some vision, and some idea of what we want. Of course, some expectations are unrealistic and this causes tremendous stress, anxiety, anger, struggle, and discontent. But other expectations are reasonable and realistic. Whatever the case, it's not *having* the expectation that gets us in trouble; it's when the expectation is *not met* that gives us difficulty.

When your expectations are not met, you can experience a psychological response including anger, resentment, anxiety, frustration, disappointment, etc. In fact, disappointment always points to an unmet expectation. This physiological response often causes people to choose the path at the fork that leads to what I call "The Ugly," the inappropriate, unproductive, and unprofessional expression of emotion – loss of temper, yelling, conflict, bad feelings, name-calling, gossip, etc. In fact, this response leads to poor relationships, decreases morale, and can be deadly to a leader's reputation as well as detrimental to the environment or culture of the workplace or your home. It leads to fear, causes shame, and requires effort to correct as well as time to heal.

Take a Step Back

The opportunity for choosing a better response is at the stuck point, that moment when you feel the anger start or the frustration creep in. What are you assuming here? Take a step back and question your assumption. The employee should know better but she did this anyway. Why? That's what you need to find out. The employee's response will give you direction – either she did know better and did it anyway in which case you might need to reinforce the policies, rules, and guiding values; or she didn't know better and requires additional training.

When you take that step back, you are able to stand strong against your emotions. Take a deep breath and ask the person some questions about what they were thinking or feeling that would cause them to make that choice. If you are an emotional wreck and not in control, your behavior may instill fear and the person will respond to that with defensiveness or by cowering. And in that moment, you lost your opportunity to step into their world to discover how they handle their fear, what thoughts they have in moments of stress, or their knowledge base on your organizational policies. You might learn that they have difficulty asking for help or perhaps they don't know when to defer to their manager or supervisor for assistance. There is a huge difference in your effectiveness as a leader when you are able to create a safe space for someone to be themselves – right or wrong in their thinking – but okay wherever they are. Detach from believing or wishing their thinking was different and instead, stay grounded in reality. If your child draws on the wall, then clearly she didn't know the rule well enough or believe in it enough to follow it. You can choose to get angry and yell, or you can choose to love her in spite of her mistake.



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This requires a huge amount of self-awareness to be able to recognize what you are feeling in that moment, as well as self-management so you can maintain self-control and make good choices to honor the this human being in front of you.

Human beings are infinitely more valuable than the rules or thoughts about how things should be done. In that moment, if you succumb to the emotional current, it may be difficult to remember that people come first.

Fear of Confrontation

Leaders often have difficulty addressing issues for many reasons all of which are habits of thought and not actual, real issues. In other words, you might want people to like you so you value being liked over confronting the issue. You might be concerned about how the other person will react so you value keeping the peace over clearing up the problem. You also could care so much for others that you feel bad about saying anything at all because you don't want them to feel bad. You could have difficulty with rules yourself so a little rebellion on the part of someone else excites you.

These are all value judgments or thought patterns. But when you operate based on these thoughts, you cannot create the reality that you want. Focusing on being liked for instance, won't bring you respect from others; in fact, it often has the opposite effect.

People want to be great but they don't always know how. They want to do a great job but often their thoughts and impulses get in the way. Your job as a leader, is to see the good in others, have compassion, empathize by understanding where they are coming from, and then lead them in the direction they need to go.

"Wow! That is a beautiful picture! Look how colorful that is. You are truly an exceptional artist. Now, where are you supposed to draw? Are you supposed to draw on the wall? You are going to help clean that up now and I will get you some paper to use, ok?"

To your employee, you might validate him using empathy first by acknowledging what he might be feeling: *"That was a difficult situation with customer Jones. Are you okay?"* Once you've addressed his emotional state, then you can discuss things he did, things he didn't do, things he needed to do, and how he can do things differently in the future. You can also identify gaps in learning and/or any attitude issues (not following rules, for instance, or maverick behaviors) if that is a problem.

By keeping yourself cool when you find yourself in that "stuck" place, you can walk yourself through it and choose a better, more effective, and professional path. It also is more enjoyable – you remain in control of yourself, you engage with others on a deeper, more respectful level, and the process feels good for all parties.

Want to learn more about this topic? Contact Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com to arrange a free coaching session. Julie Fuimano, RN, MBA, CSAC is named one of the TOP 100 THOUGHT LEADERS in personal leadership development. Your happiness and success is her business! As a certified coach, accomplished writer, and motivational speaker, Julie empowers your personal best teaching you simple, practical strategies for meeting your goals, communicating effectively, establishing personal boundaries, managing your emotions, and living happily. Coaching clients experience dramatic and profound results in their productivity, level of confidence, and relationships. She is the author of the life manual and confidence builder, [The Journey Called YOU: A Roadmap to Self-Discovery and Acceptance](#). Visit www.NurturingYourSuccess.com to learn more about coaching or contact Julie@NurturingYourSuccess.com to have her speak at your next meeting or conference.



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