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Investor's Business Daily

Help People In The Office Lighten Up

Tuesday April 10, 7:00 pm ET
Gloria Lau

What determines a person's level of success? Is it his charisma, her willingness to work long hours, his MBA from Stanford or Harvard?

Flip Flippen, a psychotherapist and business coach in College Station, Texas, argues that success comes from something else -- eliminating negative behavior.

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"No matter who you are or what you want to achieve, ignoring your behavioral constraints is a blueprint for failure," he said. He discusses this in his book, "The Flip Side."

Flippen has advised Fortune 500 companies, such as construction firm Trinity Industries, defense contractor ITT and IMG, the world's largest sports management company. He shares his tips:

Bulldozers. "You see lots of people in leadership do this. They're overly aggressive and dominate every meeting. They don't listen to others, so people around them shut down, and it's a one-man show." Flippen

says bulldozers should try to improve because if forced to compete against another team that works well together, a bulldozer's team often loses.

Flip advises bulldozer clients to apologize to colleagues for their behavior and declare that they'll change. Then make a commitment to be quiet in meetings and ask for others' input. Thank them for their thoughts, and don't say, "Yes, but."

"When people disagree with you, don't argue with them," he said. "Rather, ask for clarification. You could say, 'My tendency is to want to disagree, but help me better understand what you mean.'"

Icebergs. These people struggle with building relationships. They find it difficult to be nurturing and affirming at work and home. This is a problem because managing business well means attending to people. Flippen tells clients to send an encouraging e-mail or pay a compliment to one person every day.

Practice engaging people. If colleagues approach, drop what you're doing and smile. Even chat a few minutes before returning to work.

Ask deeper questions to learn what is important to others. And then shake hands or give someone a pat on the back.

Build Improvement

Three years ago, Dale Hedrick, owner of Hedrick Bros. Construction in West Palm Beach, Fla., started using Flippen's techniques on himself and his 130 employees. The firm, which has over \$50 million in yearly revenue, builds high-end homes and commercial buildings.

Hedrick has a type-A personality. He started by looking at his own faults: showing up late, using sarcasm and lacking nurturing skills.

"I would disrespect people by showing up late," Hedrick said. "I learned to show up on time and catch myself when I act sarcastic."

Hedrick now requires new hires to sign a social contract. It asks people to treat each other respectfully and honor confidences.

The point 19 to foster a friendly and productive workplace that leads to more profit.

"Humble yourself and ask for feedback," Hedrick said. "Tell people you're serious about wanting to improve. People felt they (were in a) precarious position, having to hold the owner accountable. But they eventually held my feet to the fire."

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