

Reducing Conflict 85 Cordial Hypocrisy

By Bob Whipple MBA CPTD



One factor that causes a lot of conflict in this world is the concept of cordial hypocrisy. That term may not be familiar to you, so let me explain. Some people come across as two-faced. They are all smiles and compliments when a person is present. When the person goes away, they turn sinister and spout out all kinds of negative things.

There are varying degrees of cordial hypocrisy, but they all tend to undermine a culture of trust. They lead to hard feelings and conflict within groups. How can you eliminate this type of hurtful behavior in your organization?

Steps you can take to exterminate cordial hypocrisy

It is important to have a documented set of behaviors that everyone in the group has approved. Take time with your team and brainstorm a list of behaviors that are important to model. Make sure everyone in the group participates in the brainstorm.

Distill a list of six to ten key behaviors that have buy-in from the entire team. Make the list visible and ask everyone to commit to these behaviors. Some groups like to go to the extreme where people actually sign the document.

A good book on reducing cordial hypocrisy

Authors Seth Silver and Timothy Franz have written on this topic. In their book, *Meaningful Partnership at Work*, they describe how to construct a “Workplace Covenant.” The Covenant is an agreement among the team and the leader. It is the basis for reducing cordial hypocrisy and other bad habits. The book describes a tested process for improving accountability in any organization.

Why the technique works

The practice of documenting expected behaviors gives a template for people to hold each other accountable. If someone slips and starts to display cordial hypocrisy, there is a cure. Someone else can gently remind that person that “we are not doing that anymore.” Since everyone in the group has already agreed upon the behavior, the problem is quickly squashed.

One precaution

If your team has gone to the trouble of constructing a set of expected behaviors, you must enforce them, or they will fade quickly. Have frequent reminders in group meetings

and reinforce those who call out violations. Doing this will ensure the rules have staying power and will be useful for the future.

Remember to add the expected behavior list to the onboarding process for new employees. You may want to have a new employee sign the behavior list to ensure understanding.

What if someone ignores the rules?

At first, there may be some testing of whether the rules are really enforced by the group. It is essential that everyone shares unanimity with enforcement. If someone is allowed to ignore one of the behaviors without a consequence, you must fix that quickly.

Summary

You can control the practice of cordial hypocrisy and other negative habits by creating a charter of behaviors. Enforce these behaviors or they will lose their impact over time.

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