

## Reducing Drama

by **Bob Whipple, MBA, CPTD**



I once participated in an interesting discussion in an online leadership class. The students were lamenting that drama in the workplace is common and very disruptive to good teamwork.

The impetus for drama is more apparent in the confusing post-pandemic era. It is easy for some people to feel there are unfair rules.

Drama is really just part of the human condition. I am sure you have experienced unwanted drama and wished there were ways to reduce it.

First, one precaution. There are different kinds of drama and many different symptoms and sources. In this article, I am discussing the most common kind of drama in the workplace. This is where people act out their daily frustrations. They create chaos and loss of focus. Also, they hurt the productivity, effectiveness, and teamwork of the group. I am not addressing the serious drama caused by mental illness or tragic events.

Let's take a look at the seeds of this problem to identify some mitigating strategies. Drama is often a result of people who feel they are not being heard. If an individual believes his or her opinions are valued, then there is less need for drama. If the culture is real and trusting, then people are not playing games with each other. The distractions of drama will likely be reduced.

It is a function of leaders to establish a culture of high trust. People see little need for drama to be a vital part of the real action. Here are some tips that leaders can use to reduce drama in their organizations:

1. **Improve the level of trust.** High trust groups respect people. There is a feeling of inclusiveness that does not require high profile actions to get attention.
2. **Anticipate needs.** Be proactive at sensing when people need to be heard. Provide the opportunity for dialog before they become frustrated.
3. **Respect outliers.** When someone's view is contrary to the majority, there may be valid points to consider. Do not ignore the valuable insights of all people.
4. **Hear people out and consider their input seriously.** Positive body language is essential to show respect for all people.
5. **Work on your own humility.** Climbing down off your pedestal means that you are more willing to be on an equal footing with others.
6. **Admit mistakes.** You gain respect when you are honest about the blunders that you make. People will feel less like acting out in response if they see you willing to be vulnerable.
7. **Reinforce people well.** Providing sincere praise is one way to show respect. This reduces people's tendency to say "Hey don't forget about me over here."

We must also realize that some people are world class at creating drama. For these people it is a kind of sport. They do it to gain inappropriate attention or just to be disruptive.

These people need coaching to let them know their antics are not really helping drive the goals of the organization. The leader needs to provide feedback about the issue and set the expectation of improvement. If the drama continues, then the person may be better off in some other organization.

Drama is all around most of us daily. Good leadership can mitigate the negative impact and keep bad habits from becoming an organizational albatross.

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