

The Toxic Work Environment

The outcry by some employees that the workplace environment is not healthy, raises questions regarding what has given rise to the environment that is described as toxic, volatile and hostile. What seems apparent, is that there is a breakdown in the work relationship. In an attempt to understand what the causation factors are, it requires the application of a sense of objectivity and the application of a non-bias approach to be taken in assessing the situation at each workplace.

For starters, the act of finger pointing at either the employer /management or workers, without first having an understanding of the facts and mitigating circumstances, it would be premature in the conducting an assessment of the existing state of affairs. Regrettably, there seems to be the haste to cast blame on the actions, conduct, attitude and decisions of the employer or management. The claim ought not to be dismissed that some employers/ management, often fail to act fairly, prudently, professionally or demonstrate transparency in the conducting of business. Moreover, their dictatorial management style, abrasive actions and controlling manner, can inflame passions, emotions, create tensions, reduce workplace productivity and destroy the commitment of employees.

Whereas employers/ management may stand out as a source in the creation of workplace tension and hostility, it cannot be ignored that workers are also party to what happens in the work environment. It would be wrong to give the impression that some employee are not guilty of being demanding, undermining of management decisions, unprofessional in their behaviour, insubordinate, rude and uncooperative. Workplace tensions may also be linked to the exhibition of poor people and social skills by management, supervisory management personnel and employees.

For the most part, it sounds sensational and present a dramatic picture when the employer or management personnel is painted as the monster and the source of the problem. Before casting blame on either the employer / management or the workers, it is important to assess the state of communication which exists within the organization. Where there is a breakdown in communication, this can potentially impact on employee morale, engagement/participation, cooperation, productivity and satisfaction. In the absence of effective workplace communication, this gives room for demoralization and demotivation to surface amongst employees.

In working towards having a congenial workplace, positive communication must be at the core of the relationship between the employer, management and employees. The building of trust becomes essential to the building of positive communication and good workplace relations. Two way communication must be encouraged and strategies are to be found by employers and management to let employees know that their input is valued. Communication must be seen as the key to driving team working, if the parties are to work together towards achieving the goals of the organization or enterprise.

Employers ought to understand that they have a responsibility to prevent a hostile or toxic workplace environment from prevailing. Commonsense should prevail and employers should

thread cautiously so as not to infringe on the rights of workers. Employees on the other hand should also act responsibly. They ought to understand and appreciate that they are required to respect the decisions of management, follow workplace policies, rules and regulations, observe practices and maintain standards set. Employees who are guilty of inciting non-compliant behaviour and or creating division amongst staff, must be made aware that they are contributing to the creation of a hostile work environment.

A toxic work environment can create stress, tensions, a show of dissent by employee, a high turnover of staff, and to matters being placed before the law courts. With this knowledge, employers, management and employees should become aware that a hostile work environment is counterproductive to the building of good workplace relationships and to maintaining the stability and integrity of the workplace. For progress to be made, it requires that employees accept that change in an organization or enterprise is inevitable. Employers are required to play their part in establishing and maintaining a conducive environment, by practicing transparency and Inclusive leadership, and refraining from comments and actions that can lead to the creation of unwanted tensions.

It should be etched on the minds of employers, management personnel and employees that a toxic work environment can be prevented, if there is a consciousness that insensitive, inappropriate actions and irresponsible behaviour would create a problem. Refraining from engaging in acts of indiscretion, victimization, discrimination, favouritism and unfair practices, would be in the employer's, management and employees best interest.