CREATION OF POSITIVE WORK CULTURE & INTRODUCTION TO TEAM NORMS

What are the most common workplace issues for managers? Many people believe that on-going conflict is simply a group dynamic which is beyond our control and that little or nothing can minimize its adverse effects on the workplace. We tolerate turnover, absenteeism and lost productivity as ‘costs of doing business.’ One often hears business owners say, “Management would be easy if it weren’t for the people problems!” By the time any healthy employee complains to management that someone is disrupting the workplace, they are almost ‘at the end of their rope’ and ready to leave. A manager must then watch for the occurrence of the problem behavior in the complained of employee or group and work through progressive discipline stages before he or she can address the issue and terminate the person creating the drama and distraction, if they refuse to change with verbal warnings. This can take months and managers must also concern themselves with what sabotage this person might engage in during the meantime! Healthy employees lose respect and confidence for managers, believing they are ‘avoiding the problem’. Your good employees leave, costing the company one and a half to two times an experienced employee’s annual salary to replace them. Meanwhile, the negative employees stay and grow in informal power, and the problems spread as they indoctrinate the employees you must replace with this negative workplace culture.

What are Team Norms, and how are they created? IA uses a large group adaptation of the mediation process that assists groups in Creating and Maintaining a Positive Work Culture. The process serves to manage change and/or periods of stress that can create negativity in any normal team that hasn’t been taught healthy conflict resolution and communication skills training (which we recommend you pair with the creation of Team Norms).

The culture of a team is usually a random combination of personalities and dynamics between employees that just happens. When assisting a business or team in deliberate development of positive work culture—via creation of ‘Team Norms’—we ask each work group to construct guidelines—or ‘norms of behavior’—to which coworkers agree to hold one another accountable in the workplace—in order to make it and keep it a positive place to come to work each day. “Isn’t that what our Employee Handbook is for?” ask most managers… Well we ask, how is that working for you to control human behavior in your workplace right now?

These Team Norms have their power in the fact that the team goes through a process of mediating them together and deciding the accountability practices they are willing to engage in to make sure they endure past the exercise of creating them. IA consultants could tell any group the likely list of norms they will create, with only a few resulting changes needed by various career fields. If people would live by them, they would work to create a positive work environment.

The problem is that people are rebellious by nature and if we do not develop our own agreements, and make commitments to our peers to uphold them, we won’t abide by such guidelines. Not without strict enforcement anyway, which places the manager in a constant position of ‘policing’ or ‘mediating’ team disruptions when they normally arise in the workplace.

Almost everyone has endured a job that makes getting up in the morning pure drudgery—when one must force oneself to go to work, only to find we cannot wait to leave. Hopefully, everyone has also experienced a great team and a job
that is fulfilling and a joy to perform, making our work meaningful and fulfilling. Few people think about what makes one environment or team culture a great one and the other a poisonous place, but if we force the question, most would say, “It was/is the people and how we treated one another.” In creating Team Norms, we facilitate employees in deliberately brainstorming the **elements of the ideal workplace** as well as creating accountability strategies that prevent or quickly eliminate negative interactions—whether pre-existing or prevention of development of such behaviors in the future. **We then craft these into negotiated agreements within and between teams—at the facilitated direction of each team.**

A group of peers can agree to specific guidelines of behavior in order to prevent the negatives and to keep the workplace a constructive and healthy environment for everyone. Maybe you are fortunate enough to have that now. In that case, **Team Norms will protect your team** from a negative person coming in and destroying it in the future. Idealistic and unrealistic you say? We hear this from every group before they start the process, yet companies make it a reality as long as peers in a workgroup commit to it. After all, who really wants to stand up and say they want and intend to perpetuate a negative workplace? Even if they have a secret or unconscious need to do so, their peers now know how to keep them in check. Believe it or not, we employ the same strategy to stop bullying in the public schools. 

Shouldn’t *grown-ups* have the capacity to do this at least as well as children? If children can create a **caring culture** which doesn’t allow mistreatment of any person, we believe adults can also create an environment conducive to their needs and the company’s needs as well! We at IA, live by these norms on our staff, and have seen it accomplished many times—even by teams that had been embroiled in conflict for years, or in one case—a full decade!

**The power of Team Norms lies in the buy-in created in a team which works to develop them together and commits to hold each other accountable to them.** IA builds norms in 4 areas: 1) Teamwork/Internal Customer Service; 2) External Customer Service; 3) Communication and 4) Conflict Resolution. An example of a norm that makes everyone’s list is: “**We will not gossip or be divisive.**” It really does work if everyone wants a positive environment and defines together what is expected of them in future situations. They abide by the norms in the future because they created the expectations! They hold each other accountable because they come to value the positive environment in which they work and wish to protect it. When organizations combine the power of Team Norms with Conflict Resolution & Communication Skills Training and build the systems needed to reinforce and support the norms and training from the company’s administrative position, in order to ensure that all employees have the necessary skills and support to carry out the Team Norms—companies save time, money, productivity and human resources! Well worth any company’s investment!

**Call 713-222-2525 to set a free consultation appointment.**

**Agency Experience**  Innovative Alternatives, Inc. (IA) has worked with corporations, small business, nonprofits, universities, hospitals, churches, schools and associations for 25 years, implementing programs, performing mediations and providing conflict resolution, management coaching and other types of training, as well as assisting teams in establishing positive work cultures and acting as an outsourcing resource for personnel-related mediation including those between teams and/or departments. **IA has facilitated interventions which bring about resolution of decade-long conflicts within organizations to improve individual and team productivity, decrease potential for litigation and improve employee relationships and the perceptions of the company as fair.** IA is also a premier training and organizational development agency, having developed Violence Prevention Programs for Schools which are sought after by other countries such as China, Armenia, Azerbaijan, and Bosnia. Arranged through the US State Department, these delegations visited our agency to obtain knowledge about how to teach children new ways of handling conflict which do not involve war, in order to preserve the future of their cultures and nations.

**Continuity:** The agency founder, President/CEO and creator of these programs remains after 25 years! The Vice President, COO has 18 years tenure!