**Chapter 14 - Handling Specific Difficult Situations**

Chapter 14 covered two common difficult situations. Here are some tips on how to handle three other situations that can cause difficulty:

* An older colleague
* The team member who brings personal problems into work
* The emotional blackmailer

*An older colleague*

There may be occasions when you are asked to lead a project and you discover you will have an older person in your team. Beware of jumping to conclusions or making false assumptions concerning their motivations and their attitude towards you. For example, you might say to yourself James is eight months away from retiring so he won’t be motivated, or Marielle is much older than me and so she will not take any instructions from me. Your assumptions may be totally wrong; put them aside and focus on the project that needs to be carried out.

* Agree a shared understanding of what the successful completed piece of work should look like, the deadline and how you would like your colleague to keep you informed of progress and problems
* The older person may be highly experienced; you could ask them for ideas on how the project could be approached and completed
* When delegating to the older colleague they probably will not need any detailed guidance from you on the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ the work should be done
* Sit down with your colleague and contract about what would be a good working relationship between you. Some points to guide your discussion are in the Holding the Mirror exercise we refer to at the end of this Chapter.

*A team member who brings personal problems into work*

It used to be the practice that people kept their personal problems separate from their work life. We are now more open as a society and over the last couple of decades it has become more acceptable to share information about personal life even at work in a way that would have been surprising a generation ago. This means that some colleagues may bring their personal problems into the office and discuss them throughout the day.

While it may be helpful for the individual to talk and be able to gain support from their team colleagues, the working day can also offer a troubled colleague an opportunity for a brief respite from their personal problems by losing themselves in the work that needs to be done. If you have a colleague with a serious personal problem who continues to want to talk about their personal life, of course be empathic. You could ask them about specialist sources of support; encourage them to continue to seek support from these specialists and, at a later date, ask your colleague how they are getting on.

On a more general note, personal problems shared constantly with the team can encourage the kind of unhelpful gossip and speculation which can undermine the individual’s competence and personal authority, as well as hindering good team working. If these interruptions continue it may be appropriate - for the sake of your colleague and the team – to have a confidential word with your manager. Perhaps what your colleague really needs most is some time away from work altogether, with access to professional support.

*The emotional blackmailer*

This is the colleague who seems to need to get their own way in 1 to 1 conversations and at meetings by typically becoming upset and emotional and saying things like ‘no-one ever listens to me’, ‘I’m always on the losing side’, or ‘I will feel very hurt ……..’ (If I don’t get my own way).

You can continue to walk on eggshells around this person, but this is not a preferable option. An alternative is to have a private conversation in which you make a classic "I" statement. Name the unproductive behaviour you have observed, state the effect it has on you personally, and request a change of behaviour. Work out your statement ahead of time so you know your exact message. Don't negotiate. Don't speak for anyone else, only yourself. Don't apologize, either for yourself or for other team members. Say your piece and end the conversation. Take “courage mon brave!” or as a colleague once said, “you cannot expect a bunch of flowers at the end of each month as well as your salary cheque!”