

## Chapter One

### **DID WE FORGET HOW TO BE FUNNY?**



*We all have a set of rules for how we play our game of life. We use the same rules whether we are at work, at home, or play. What is your set of rules?*

*–Suzy Greene*

On a cold, foggy late afternoon a Fortune 100 company's top sixteen directors gather for our first session. One senior executive doesn't take a seat. Jack paces around the room, hovering over his fellow colleagues sitting around a U-shaped conference table. The men watch while listening to him squawking, *send her home. Who is she? She doesn't know anything about our business. We do not need to listen to her.*

Calmly I passed a note to the Vice President who contracted me to work with this high level management group: *everything is fine. Leave it to me.*

What I saw was not an obnoxious man, but an apprehensive man. The letters F-E-A-R branded across his forehead. When I see this behavior, my job is to unconditionally accept that he is afraid of being vulnerable.

This has nothing to do with me.

Digging deep inside scooping up a bucket of compassion, I invite him to take a seat. Ignoring his propped frame against the wall and his scowling face a bit like the dreary weather outside, I continue.

The next day I grab the first opportunity for a private chat. Remember that bucket of compassion from last night? Today it is overflowing when I gently ask, *what are you afraid of Jack?* Taken off guard by that surprising question, he sits pondering for a couple minutes then begins to open up.

Over the next two offsite retreats we develop a closer, more authentic relationship. Then he takes a bigger leap inviting me to lead a five day offsite retreat with his executive

team at Calloway Gardens. Taking a huge risk, probably the biggest in his career, he courageously looks at his personal truth.

Sitting in a chair at the front of the room, each executive tells him about a time he/she felt confused or distrust resulting from his sarcastic comments. Jack was sure his five bantering buds had his back. They did, maybe not the way he expected. They also shared an awkward moment in their relationships with him.

After the twenty-sixth story, everyone feels Jack truly humbled by this experience. They see the recognition in his eyes and know he's giving up the game. At that very moment he won their entire support. Jack became the leader they wanted.

Can you imagine being that vulnerable in front of all your direct reports? Jack discovers his greatest strength. That day he developed a team that would follow him up the highest mountain.

That was on Thursday. Friday his daughter arrives home from college bringing her boyfriend to meet the family. Here's his story.

*Waking up Monday morning, thinking about the weekend with my daughter, I suddenly realized that I greeted our possible future son-in-law to the family by being sarcastic all weekend.*

Our inappropriate behaviors become addictive thought patterns and very difficult to change.

*Immediately picking up the phone 'Sara, this is Dad. Please forgive me. My sarcastic manner is not the way I choose to welcome David into our family. Your mother and I will fly to Philly this weekend to reintroduce ourselves, this time, no sarcasm!'*

Calling me the following Monday morning, *Susan I got it. Not an easy journey, but it was well worth it. Thank you for not giving up on me.'*



Do you realize that when frustrated or irritated, you interact and communicate in one of three different behaviors: *passive-aggressive*, *aggressive* or *passive*? At that very moment he won their entire support.

Each behavior forces you to compromise your success in managing conflict or solving a problem. These ineffective behaviors erode relationships and trust vanishes.

### **Passive-Aggressive Behavior**

Have we forgotten how to be funny without it being at the expense of someone else? Turn on your television. Go to the movies. Read your children's Facebook page. Look at the blogs and Twitter our screens are filled with examples of passive-aggressive behavior. The number one culprit is sarcasm.

Do you like sarcasm? I hear the banter in meetings and listening to golfers talk about their game. Do you offer sarcasm in large helpings at home around the dinner table? Or hear about kids sassing each other and their teachers. Have you heard a coach being sarcastic to your child on the soccer field?

What about the multi-million dollar political ad campaigns plastered across our television screens during the presidential elections? CBS Sunday Morning reported on September 23, 2012, that the Federal Election Commission said that so far the campaign advertising totaled \$533,000,000. And we still have forty-four days to go. Have you had enough yet?

### **Sarcasm**

After working with thousands, I learned closer inspection reveals that sarcasm creates confusion. Sarcasm is a double edged sword.

When you hear a sarcastic comment, do you wonder what did they really mean? The brain doesn't know where to put the information. I pulled up the word 'sarcasm' from the dictionary on the Web.

Sarcasm (noun) French sarcasme, from Late Latin sarcasmos, from Greek sarkasmos; to tear flesh, bite the lips in rage. First appeared in 1550, a sharp and often satirical utterance designed to cut or give pain.

For example, John always arrives late for meetings. When he walks in the door thirty minutes late you smile and say, 'Thanks for being on time, John.'

John sees you smile. He hears your thanks. Your voice sounds pleasant, but he knows he's late.

It's a confusing message. Your **voice, facial expression and words are not congruent with the situation.**

In a meeting working on a new project, Sally is upset because her boss insists she works late three nights this week for no additional pay. She has an idea that would benefit the project, but feels the company is not treating her well. She decides to **withhold valuable information.**

Darrel passed over for a promotion felt he deserved, yet he is asked to train the new person how to use a particular piece of equipment. Darrel chooses not to give Tom all the details. He **sets up Tom to fail.**



Sherry feels she isn't pretty. Dad gives much more attention to her cute sister, Jill. Sherry likes making **unkind** and **demeaning remarks** to Jill. She enjoys **putting her down**, making her cry. After all Jill's not very pretty with puffy, red eyes.



Mack's chore is mowing the lawn. On Sunday at 4:00 p.m. he finally gets out to do the job after much prodding from Dad. Feeling resentful, Mack mows the lawn but fails to do the edging. It is an **incomplete job.**



All these passive-aggressive behaviors **create conflict** and erode **relationships**. Often the person receiving the passive aggression laughs because they do not know how to respond. Laughter lightens the moment.

Confusion remains behind. What do they really mean? What do they want from me? Why me? Trust in the relationship diminishes.

At work you may think trust isn't important. That person just works here. Harvard Business School did a case study at Bell Labs attempting to understand superstars. Their secret, **trust counts!**

Observing one hundred fifty engineers, all had similar credentials both in education and technical skills, why then did the top ten percent continue to outperform all the others?

Superstars solve problems quicker. How do they do that, if they have the same degrees and technical expertise?

Superstars demonstrate an additional ability, emotional intelligence (EQ). They dedicate time building trusting relationships. When they call or email a colleague to get assistance on a problem, they find even though they have eleven messages, theirs is the first call to be returned. Based on the relationship, the problem becomes top priority.

Living in a global economy that never sleeps constantly bombarding us with information, how do we have enough time for family, let alone ourselves? On top of that I'm suggesting that you develop deeper relationships with colleagues. If you want help quickly, when you need it, remember, friends help friends. That's GOLD!

## **Aggressive Behavior**

Isn't aggressive behavior easier to recognize than passive-aggressive behavior? **Loud voices, tempers, cursing, bullying, fighting, slamming telephones / doors, breaking objects or throwing them across the room** are any of these examples in your bag of tricks?

Interactions are **dictatorial, controlling** and **in your face**. Aggressive people believe they need to control people and tell them what to do in order to meet their own expectations.

Usually people react to their orders. More often than not they feel unappreciated and not heard. In every human resource survey I've seen during the past three decades, if you earn more than minimum wage, respect, appreciation and being listened to rank higher than money.



It's my first week on a new job in a regional office for a national industrial manufacturer. Sixteen weeks training at headquarters included traveling all across the United States visiting vendors. The company thinks I am prepared to be the first female sales rep in the industry. Welcome to the dark ages, and it's only 1977.

Tom, regional manager based in Houston offers to be the first in his company to include a woman on his sales team.

Week one, I travel to Dallas to meet some of my new customers. It's Friday and while checking out of the hotel before heading to the airport I call Tom to bring him up to date. Remember this is the 70s, no laptops or iPhones.

My hair standing on end, Tom screaming like a banshee, *whatever happened to that freight car that shipped our product back to the plant? What are you doing about it?* He kept yelling about a client and a situation I wasn't even told I had yet. Later I learned their volume potential warranted only one sales call a year. No wonder I didn't know about them my first week on the job.

Totally dismayed by my boss's behavior, *Tom can we meet in your office at 8:00 a.m. Monday morning to discuss what is our best strategy?*

Not knowing what is about to happen I bravely walk into his office and close the door. Calmly serving my own head on a large chopping block, *Tom, I know this is only my second week on the job after training. It will take a few days to learn who my clients are and about their issues. I choose to be treated as a professional, regardless of the problems. If I need to correct something or work with a client to solve a problem, that is my job. My father never yells at me, and I don't choose to work in an environment where I am treated this way.*

*Would you like me to resign now or can we work together in a more productive manner?*

As you can well imagine, his authority has never been questioned, let alone by a young woman. Sitting there in his executive chair looking like I slapped him across the face watching me closely he takes a deep breath, *don't leave*. From that moment he treated me with respect and we became good friends.

Six months pass, attending a reception at the St. Louis headquarters the company president surprises me. *I hear you've tamed Tom. He hasn't yelled at anyone since you joined his team. Tom is great with customers, but he intimidates people working in the offices and the plants. No one has burst into tears since you arrived.* You bet I smiled all the way home.

Later when leaving the company, I received the usual farewell gift. Then Tom gave me a very special personal gift. It wasn't so much the thoughtful gift wrapped up with a pretty blue bow that touched my heart.

Tears spilling out of my eyes I hear, *Thank you for teaching me how to work with my anger and treat people better. What I taught you here was little in comparison to the gifts you've given me.* How does life get any better than that?



Has **bullying** reached epidemic proportions? Is it destroying the way our children and grandchildren receive an education? It impacts the classroom, lunch room and on the ball field. Have you heard a soccer mom or dad out of control watching their child play?

Where do our youth learn this highly destructive behavior? Is it modeled through movies, television, electronic games, and in their living rooms? One thing I've learned about behavior is that we learn it through what is modeled to us or what is condoned or enabled. Read more about this in chapter three, *What is Reflected in Your Mirror?*

To understand more about bullying today I watched a Simpson show. After you finish reading this book you may glimpse why it is very difficult for me to watch that type of dialogue and action. Yes I know my young son finds it very amusing. Just writing that makes me sigh.

Then I am very 'greatfull' for the person that shows up and become a force to be reckoned with that makes us look at what we do and what we are thinking. Forbes<sup>i</sup> and Time<sup>ii</sup> magazines both say that Lady Gaga is one of the most influential women in the world. And she is only twenty-five.

Were you shocked when Lady Gaga<sup>iii</sup> showed up at the Grammys dressed in raw meat? It turned me off. Then I found out more about her.

There is a lot of substance to this outrageous woman who invites us all to look behind what we see on the outside.

Lady Gaga became the first woman invited to speak at Harvard University's hallowed Sanders Theatre where she puts her money behind her words. There she launched The Born This Way Foundation<sup>iv</sup> in 2011. The Gaga nonprofit is in partnership with the Harvard Graduate School of Education, Harvard's Berkman Center for Internet and Society and the John D. & Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation<sup>v</sup>.

*Their mission: to foster a more accepting society, where differences are embraced and individuality is celebrated. The Foundation is dedicated to creating a safe community that helps connect young people with the skills and opportunities they need to build a braver, kinder world. We believe that everyone has the right to feel safe, to be empowered and to make a difference in the world. Together, we will move towards acceptance, bravery and love.*

Whether you are a Lady Gaga fan or not, how can you not marvel at her imagination and creativity. Her Santa's Workshop with Disney at Barney's<sup>vi</sup> in New York City in 2011 tickled young hearts of all ages?

Her audiences span the globe. The Born Brave Bus follows her concerts creating a safe place where young people can learn how to stop bullying, in our schools, homes and on the streets.





*Wouldn't you like to see more influential people making a difference with our youth?*

## **Passive Behavior**

Growing up in sleepy Woodstock long before rock stars made their way to a farm on the other side of the mountain range, stealing the name from our quiet artsy haven nestled in the Catskill Mountains, life was a cross between *Leave It to Beaver* and *Austin City Limits*. This is the 50s and early 60s.

After several months of gentle persistence, Mom whisks Katie and me off on a new adventure, to attend a private school outside Philadelphia. Our first weekend home, just in time for my thirteenth birthday, waiting inside the front door looms a large box wrapped in pretty paper and a big shiny bow.

Opening it up right there, we didn't even make it into the living room. A dream come true, I finally have my very own hi-fi set that lets you stack albums. This birthday is looking mighty grand. At least I thought so for about ten minutes.

Then Mom delivers a slam bam welcome home kick in the gut. We're still in the entryway when Mom announces that she and Dad are divorced and he is leaving now. HUH!!!

Katie and I shatter into tiny fragile broken pieces, sobbing, totally bewildered, questions pouring through our young minds. Divorce? No one I know gets divorced!

They never argued, fought or were ugly to each other. The only fighting in our house was Katie and I arguing about whatever. If I said butter is white? Katie would say yellow! What we experienced was the **silent treatment**. Problems were **ignored**. We all lived in **denial**.



Do you know someone who has the **need to please disease**? They **avoid conflict at all costs**.

Whenever these friendly people are asked to do something, they always say yes. They are **afraid to say no**. They hate conflict.

Tasks and projects begin to pile up and you may go into overwhelm. Next **deadlines** are **missed** and you're **not able to handle priorities well**. Richard, CEO of a television station is well liked by the employees. Whoever he asks to do something usually wants to please him regardless of the urgency of the project they may already have at that time.

Richard learned in delegating tasks to question, what were *their* priorities? Were they working on preparing a live show to be aired that day? If so, he needed to find someone else to delegate the task to.



You know these passive people in your organizations and at home. You know if this describes your child's behavior. Usually friendly, hard working and constantly juggling too many tasks at once. Before you give them another project or chore, you may help them renegotiate their priorities.



*Do you want them to be successful? Won't that make your life easier too?*



These three behaviors *passive-aggressive*, *aggressive* and *passive* all erode relationships.

At different times we all probably experienced these three behaviors. The key here is to learn appropriate and responsible behavior.

At <http://communicatingworks.com> you'll find the **free How Effective is Your Communication Style? Quiz**<sup>vii</sup>. This do-it-yourself online quiz takes just a few minutes. Invite all your friends, co-workers and family to take the Quiz.

You may find the results very interesting. Nursing schools have been using my diagnostic tool in their textbooks<sup>viii</sup> for over a decade. I hope it helps you too.

A Fortune 100 company vice president sent this after our executive retreat: *I have seen stronger willingness to address the tougher issues head-on and confront stressful situations with more accountability. I witnessed greater effort by the passives (including me) to face the aggressives and not let them steamroll over the others.*

*I believe the benefit from this is people are taking more control over their destiny by providing alternatives, ideas and solutions. In the past they would sit back and let it roll by with no input.*

Accountability for our actions and communications creates healthy, responsible relationships we can depend on. We maintain respect and trust grows.

In *Difficult Conversations* by Stone, Patton and Heen<sup>ix</sup> the authors write, *Have your feelings or they will have you.* Being accountable means being responsible and maintaining inner control.

Ask yourself: do I control my feelings? Do I control my words? Do I control my actions? Do I control my behavior?

Remember what you put out will come right back at you; except it is probably going to bust your butt and that means your ego too and at the very least break your heart.

If you attempt to control other peoples' feelings, words or actions, stop the drama, Drama Mama and Drama Dude. Speak from your heart. Don't stuff your feelings or project them outwards through anger or barbs. As Dr. Phil<sup>x</sup> famously asks, *how's it working for you?*



Morris Schectman writes in *Fifth Wave Leadership*, *in this communication-intensive time, the breakthroughs for both individuals and organizations are internal. Self-aware people don't resist change; they don't make counter-productive decisions based on feelings, they don't even realize they have. People who know what drives them are much more willing, to take risks, test new ideas and aggressively pursue opportunities. The knowledge they gain gives them an advantage that can no longer be gained through external means.*

## **Exercise**

Everyone at some time in their life acted out a few of these different behavior aspects when frustrated, angry or challenged. Circle the behavior that you experience most when you're upset.

### **Passive-aggressive**

Mismatch facial expression, tone of voice and words

Sarcasm that is personal

Put down

Revenge

Setting others up for failure

Withholding information

### **Aggressive**

Loud voices

Temper

Throwing objects

Breaking things

Bullying

Cursing someone

## **Passive**

Silent treatment

Ignoring

Denial

Seething

Say 'Yes' when you'd like to say 'No'



*What conversations showed up while reading this chapter? How can you use these concepts and tools in this chapter?*

*What can you do differently?*

*What steps are you willing to take, starting now, to put this into action?*

*What will happen if you do this for thirty days?*

*How will your life change?*

i Forbes Magazine Top 100 Lady Gaga,

<http://forbes.com>

ii <http://time.com/time/specials/>

iii <http://ladygaga.com/>

iv <http://bornthiswayfoundation.org/>

v John D. & Catherine MacArthur Foundation, <http://macfound.org/>

vi Lady Gaga Santa's Workshop at Barney's in  
New York, <http://mtv.com/news/articles/1674852/>

vii *How Effective is Your Communication Style?* Quiz,  
[www.communicatingworks.com/](http://www.communicatingworks.com/)

viii *Contemporary Practical/Vocational Nursing* published  
by Lippincott Williams & Wilkins, <http://amazon.com/>

ix Check out the newer book from Stone, Patton and Heen,  
[http://amazon.com/Difficult-Conversations-Discuss-  
What-Matters/](http://amazon.com/Difficult-Conversations-Discuss-What-Matters/)

x <http://drphil.com/>