

FIX

FRUSTRATIONS AT WORK

Short Stories *Empowering
You to Make the Difference*



Kent C. Porter

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I Almost Quit, but Now I'm Fine

I sent Linda a biography to complete before we had our first coaching session. One question was, “Deep down inside of you, what is your concern?”

Her concern was, “I’ll be a bag lady.”

Linda wore an expression of wariness as she sat forward in her chair. She was a highly introverted mid-level manager.

“Tell me about the situation with your boss,” I began.

“He is causing me major stress and anxiety. I spend hours preparing for our Monday team meetings. I script what I want to say. I barely get into my script and he interrupts with a question.”

She rushed on. “It’s disruptive and puts me on my back foot. It totally takes me out of my script. I feel lost and foolish. I can’t focus on both my script and his question. I wish I were quicker on my feet. Others are—I’m not.”

When she paused, I asked if she’d talked to her boss about his interrupting her. She said she had not—that she didn’t handle conflict well.

I tried a different perspective. “Linda, if your boss stepped on your foot and it hurt, what would you do?”

“I’d say ouch,” she replied, “but if I said anything to him about interrupting he’d probably tell me to get over it, answer his questions, and move on.”

Would You Tell a Friend She’s Frustrating You?

How about outside of work? When one of your close friends frustrates you and you can’t avoid the situation any longer, how do you tell your friend that you’re frustrated?” I asked.

Long pause. “I’d tell my friend what she did that frustrated me, and if it continues what it would do to our friendship. I would be honest, open, and vulnerable.”

“Can you do the same thing with your boss?” I asked.

“I’m the only woman on the leadership team,” she responded. “If I go down the honest, open, vulnerability path I risk losing credibility and my ability to influence.”

“Linda, I know the fear you have of losing your job,” I said. “Before our next meeting, make a list of pros and a list of cons for your job, talk to friends, and we’ll discuss what you want to do.”

At our next meeting, there was no pros/cons list. Linda said, “My boss’s behavior is causing me so much stress I’m ready to quit. I have nothing to lose now, so let’s go back to the points you made earlier about having a difficult conversation. I will be vulnerable by telling him the emotional impact his interruptions have on me.”

Have You Judged Him?

“Linda, before you have this conversation,” I said with conviction, “or any other meaningful one, please check your mindset. Have you judged, tried and convicted him of being a bad boss, or can you move to a more caring and neutral frame of mind?”

“Think of him as human—flawed, but trying to be the best he can. Just as you’d like a second chance, give him one.”

Linda agreed and we role played the following scenario: “Boss, I am frustrated and I’m the problem because I haven’t told you what is frustrating me. I’m an introvert.

“I prepare what I’m going to say for our Monday morning team meetings. I script out what I want to say. But I start by following my script and you interrupt with questions. This breaks the rhythm of my script. I lose my place and get frustrated.

“My fear is I will say something foolish. I’m starting to stutter. I’ve never stuttered in my life. I’m not sleeping well. I tell myself to get over it and it shouldn’t bother me. It doesn’t work and that makes me feel worse.

“There is a solution. If you would, please hold your questions, let me finish, then look over at me and ask, ‘Linda are you finished?’ Do this and I won’t be stressed. I won’t fear Monday team meetings and I will be a more relaxed, productive me.”

After we role-played, Linda had the conversation and the boss changed. More significant was the change in Linda. She saw how she could influence her boss and others and was more confident because she faced the fear of speaking up.

LINDA'S TAKEAWAYS:

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- I almost quit, but now I'm fine.
- I'll tell my friends to never quit without trying to improve the situation first.
- I faced my fear and now I'm stronger.
- Ask yourself on a regular basis:
- Is there a conversation I'm avoiding?
- How is my silence affecting me and others?
- If the roles were reversed, would I want them to talk to me?