

Enabling the Right Start In Tackling Hard Relational Problems At Work



In this article, you will learn from a real-life situation about enabling the right start in tackling hard relational problems at work.

Last year, the leader of a change initiative in a healthcare organization came to me for help as she was very frustrated. Despite many conversations with the medical director of the largest clinic, he still was resistant to the change. She felt he was very controlling.

She and I began by exploring her thoughts and feelings. She felt pressured by a short timeline and exasperated that her well-prepared arguments had failed. Then I asked how her actions might be contributing to the medical director's resistance. No matter how excellent we are as leaders, we all react to stress in ways which contribute in some way to problems. Our own behavior is at least one thing over which we have control. She believed her persistence in pushing her ideas was likely provocative for the medical director.

Just realizing our contribution to problems may enable us to see new strategies. More often, as with this leader, we need to contrast our current approaches with our ideal (our vision and goals) for the type of relationships we want to create. With help, this leader rediscovered her deep commitment to assuring that people feel their concerns are heard. She was amazed she had forgotten this in the situation. But, it is astonishingly easy to lose hold of our vision and goals under stress no matter how often we revisit them.

She then knew what to do. Instead of pushing arguments, she asked the medical director questions to find out what was important to him and to address his concerns. Over three meetings, he got behind the change.

Of many approaches for enabling the right start with relational problems, we used two of the most powerful: first, identifying our own counterproductive patterns and second, revisiting our vision and goals for relationships. The tension that arises in contrasting our current behaviors versus the ideal evokes creativity.

Human affairs are so dynamic and unpredictable that starting off on the wrong foot at times is inevitable. Enabling the right start requires life-long practice. This is hard to sustain in daily work. To address this, I am offering a new four week format of four one-to-one meetings with me by video webinar. See the link below for more information.

I hope this article leads you to more compassion for your bad starts with relational problems and enables right starts more often.

Additional Resources

For more information about getting support in strengthening your leadership practice, see [Adaptive Sprints](#).

About Neil Baker M.D.

Neil Baker M.D. helps strengthen and enhance the impact of individual leaders, leadership teams, and consultants (e.g. quality consultants and improvement advisors) in the midst of work in order to create environments which foster learning, motivation, well-being, and performance.

He is adept at assisting leaders in using any work situation, even the most complex and difficult, as an opportunity to achieve immediate impact on quality of work relationships and on progress toward results. This approach can be applied to any current work but is especially effective in the midst of quality or innovation initiatives.

He has developed these approaches through more than 30 years as an organizational leader, speaker, consultant, and coach. His clients have included the Peterson Center on Healthcare, Health Quality Partners, and the Harvard Medical School Center for Primary Care. He has served as faculty and improvement advisor over 15 years for multiple initiatives for the Institute for Healthcare Improvement in Boston, Massachusetts and was previously Medical Director of Clinical Improvement at Group Health Cooperative (now part of the Kaiser system) in Seattle, Washington.

You can learn more on his website at neilbakerconsulting.com.