



The Dangerous Waters of *Intent vs. Impact*



An issue I often see in my work with teams, organizations and in individual coaching is the conflict that arises from one's intent vs. the impact of their actions. It's a constant source of conflict, hurt feelings, or even worse in situations involving sexual harassment.

Sharing Your Intent Can Make A Difference



**A Word About
intent vs. impact
where
sexual harassment
is concerned:**

Sexual harassment has been well litigated and it is very clear that the intent of the person making a comment or exhibiting a particular behavior is not relevant if the impact to the person on the receiving end is viewed as unwelcome, hostile or harassing in nature.

So for years, when I did workshops about sexual harassment, that was the key point – it's not about your intent! The perception of your words and behaviors

The pace of work these days is so fast, that decisions can be made quickly and without being conscious of why we are doing something. Our experience may have guided that decision, but as we become more skilled, we sometimes forget to communicate the lessons, reasons and intent that drive our actions. Sharing your intent up front can create a whole different outcome when people understand why you are doing something.

Intent vs. impact cuts two ways.

On one hand, when you don't share your intent with folks, they may not understand the why behind your actions. Their perceptions and reactions, and thus the ultimate impact of your actions may be the opposite of what you intended and can work against you in building credibility, relationships, and in ultimately reaching your business goals. When you help them see what you see and understand your favorable intent toward them and toward the accomplishment of common goals, they have the opportunity to follow your line of thinking. The outcomes can be everything you envisioned with everyone on the same page.

On the other hand, good intentions are not always enough and can even produce the opposite results, even if people do understand your intentions. Sometimes you may have good intentions, but your actions are simply not helpful, not supportive to the other person or not effective toward reaching goals. In those cases, it is important to recognize that your actions, regardless of how well-intended, are producing the wrong results and it's time to change direction.

One of Einstein's most recognized quotes is,

are what matter legally.



If your intent is to help, here are some ways...

- Ask the other person what would be helpful
- Listen to understand
- Be empathetic
- Share your goals and ask theirs
- Collaborate on a solution
- Don't make assumptions

If you want to assess impact, here are some ways...

- Watch body language
- Look at facial expressions
- Ask what the other person's reaction is to your idea or action and then listen carefully
- If it's not received well, ask why
- Look for signs they are shutting down

"Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting different results."

Here are some examples of situations where I have helped coaching clients learn the value of sharing their intent up front, so they can achieve different results in the future:

Situation #1:

An employee of a company, which relies on their image and reputation to maintain and attract clients, takes time from his business and personal schedule to attend both industry and community networking events as a representative of the company. He does this to help create good will in the community and a favorable impression of the company. He puts in more than his share of work hours and completes his assignments on time. However, later, through discussions about scheduling work assignments, he learns that others have a negative attitude about the time he spends networking, see no value in it, and think if he spent less time networking that he could put in even more hours at work.

He was doing something that was definitely of value to the company, although not something openly discussed or recognized by the company. So, this individual might have benefitted from talking about this in his performance review as a goal and asking to talk about the issue at a staff meeting with the support of the manager. Such a discussion could raise the awareness of the value of such networking and maybe even encourage others to participate.

Situation #2:



Microaggressions?

Those are the little things that can upset someone.

They are like a drip – one is not so significant. But many drips can make a big impact. One, after another, after another, can build up and figuratively speaking, the dam breaks. It means someone may explode or react in a way that's not good for anybody involved.

So, here is some advice when you are on the receiving end of microaggressions:

First, Assume Positive Intent! Are there jerks out there in the work world – yes, but in my experience, they are few and far between. So, when another person does something that doesn't sit well with you, before getting angry or letting your frustration build, try to think of a favorable intention they might have had in what they did. Most people go to work wanting to do a good job, be helpful to others and have good relationships with their co-workers. Unfortunately, from

The manager (mgr A) of a team who dealt with internal clients was approached by a manager (mgr B) from another department who expressed dissatisfaction with the way a newer employee of mgr A had handled a situation. So mgr A approached the employee to ask what happened. The employee exploded and told the manager they were handling the situation and refused to give any other information. That was an inappropriate reaction to one's manager and verges on insubordination. Handling that is a separate issue, but here's the point I want to make about intent as it relates to this situation. When a manager asks a question of an employee, it's not unusual for that employee to feel that they are in trouble for some reason and to therefore react defensively. After all, it's "the boss" asking.

If you are a manager, you can build rapport with direct reports by talking about issues ahead of time and explaining your intent in how you want to handle various types of situations should they arise. For example, you could say to your team, "Our internal clients often do not understand the various rules and procedures with which we have to comply. As a result, sometimes I get a complaint. When that happens, I need to know, from your perspective what the situation was, how you handled it and if they were upset about anything, what it was. That way, I can run interference for you, help educate other managers and support you in the process. If there's a better way to handle something in the future, I want to help you with that too, so as a team, we will have the best possible client satisfaction."

Situation #3:

A manager, wanting to support one of her newer reps

my examples, good intentions are often perceived differently. Perception is incredibly powerful and differences in perception are often the source of conflict. Before jumping to conclusions with your perceptions, take a minute to give the other person a break, assume they had positive intent. Maybe a conversation would be helpful to understand them and help them understand your reaction. It will go a long way to building better relationships!

Second, if it happens again, and you still haven't discussed it, assume it is a coincidence.

Third, if it happens a third time, it's definitely time for a conversation!

If you need to know how to handle that conversation, my most popular workshop is "Handle Difficult Conversations with Confidence".

Contact me to discuss offering this workshop for your team or organization.

by giving him visibility and building his credibility, asked the rep to make a brief introductory presentation at a meeting of other staff and some of their bigger clients. The rep had a very negative reaction and rejected the opportunity to make the presentation. When you are trying to help someone by opening doors or creating opportunities for them, they may not have the experience to understand what you are trying to do for them. You may even think, how ungrateful can they be, right? By sharing your intent and how it can benefit them, you may create a whole different reaction and even help the employee see you as the supportive, caring manager you are!

Next time you try to be helpful, think first about what you are doing and why. Think about how you can communicate your intent to get others on board, rather than later suffer the disappointment, rejection, disrespect, lack of appreciation, etc. that can come from others not understanding what you are trying to do to be helpful.

Just a few words about that flip side of intent –

Have you ever found yourself saying, “Well, I was just trying to be helpful!” That may be a clue that the impact, while well intended, wasn’t helpful! Truly helping someone means doing it in a way that THEY perceive as helpful. Even if you think it’s good for them, if they don’t see it as helpful then, IT ISN’T HELPFUL! It’s that simple. You cannot force help upon someone because of your good intentions.

Also, good intentions are not a defense to an action or behavior that created a negative impact for someone else. You are ultimately responsible for the outcomes of your actions. I have actually witnessed people who

Sometimes you just
have to let people
escape with their
good intentions
intact.

Claudio Sanchez

It has been more wittily
than charitably said that hell
is paved with good
intentions; they have their
place in heaven also.

Robert Southey

I like this quote best of all, because it acknowledges both truths of good intentions. Sometimes sharing your intentions makes all the difference in having a positive result.

Other times, your good intentions are useless when faced with the result. It takes wisdom and care to know the difference.

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think, because their intentions were good, the other person is in the wrong for their reaction. Guess again! If you got a negative reaction, then learn from it and reassess your approach for the future. Take the time to talk to the person to understand why it wasn't helpful.

Are you struggling with some difficult situations at work? Schedule a complimentary 30-minute call with me. I'm happy to help.

Create Positive Impact,



[Click below to schedule time with me.](#)



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