

# That Was Stupid – What’s Wrong With You?

by Jim Platt

**A**lthough we may think of ourselves as being highly respectful of others in the work place, they may not agree with that perception. On occasion, we may engage in behavior that, contrary to our belief, actually may be viewed by others as thoughtless and egregious. Sometimes those actions are deliberate and obvious. Sometimes they are not. The more apparent, easier to recognize examples of disrespectful behavior in the work place include:

- **Name-calling or harassing;**
- **Tantrums and displays of rage;**
- **Shaming (especially in front of other employees), intimidating, or threatening;**
- **Being argumentative solely to draw someone into a fight;**
- **Swearing or using obscene language;**
- **Refusing to follow authority (insubordination);**
- **Displaying insulting or obscene cartoons, jokes, etc., that might be offensive; or**
- **Gossiping and spreading rumors.**

Making a conscious effort to be respectful really is not that difficult. However, having the courage to confront blind spots (we all have them) in our interactions may be more elusive. In other words, when someone says, “Ouch, you just stepped on my toe!”, your challenge is to consider accepting that yes, you actually just stepped on his or her toe. Initially, there may be an experience of denial or disbelief—“no, I couldn’t have done that to you, that crunching sound was the result of squashing a dust bunny; I would *never* think of deliberately hurting you.” Although, there may be a genuine lack of understanding of the relationship between the behavior and the corresponding response, someone who is truly concerned about maintaining a respectful work place carefully listens to the concern being expressed. At that point, hopefully, a mutually respectful and thoughtful conversation can continue.

When angry or frustrated, we may “overstep” boundaries and deliberately offer disrespectful statements. On other occasions, we truly may be unaware of how our behavior impacts someone else. These subliminal forms of disrespectful communication can create havoc, since they can be difficult to identify and categorize for the receiver (and especially difficult for the perpetrator to understand). Some examples of how this indirect disrespectful behavior can be displayed in the work place are:

- **Asking for input and opinion and then discounting or ignoring it;**
- **“Forgetting” to share credit for collaborative work;**
- **Withholding information or not following through with tasks that others need to successfully perform the job;**

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- Refusing to listen or interrupting others before they are finished. This may include “controlling” the conversation by sighing or groaning, rolling the eyeballs, or outright closing one’s eyes and putting one’s head on the table.
- Refusing to acknowledge someone when passing them in the hallway;
- Being disruptive in meetings (chronically arriving late, having conversations during the meeting/ presentation);
- Exhausting supplies and not replenishing, or notifying the appropriate person;
- Loud boisterous dialogue, or playing musical devices that may cause others to lose concentration;
- Slamming doors or drawers roughly, throwing phones, etc.; or
- Staying negative—continuing to blame other people, places, or things.

The impact of disrespectful behavior in the work place can be immediate as well as insidious. Ongoing themes of defending and attacking become the focus of our efforts, rather than attaining the mission of the department or the College. The cohesiveness of the group suffers resulting in reduction of morale, decreased productivity, increased tardiness and absenteeism, and a sense of chronic stress (“fight or flight response”).

### **SO WHAT CAN I DO?**

**Begin by trying to be as objective as possible. Ask yourself: “How would I feel if someone treated me the way I am treating them?”**

**Learn basic strategies for stress reduction.**

**Engage in basic effective communication strategies.**

**This includes asking for clarification when you believe that you may have been misunderstood, or you fear that you do not understand the other party.**

**Practice taking responsibility and holding yourself accountable.**

**Understand the difference between assertiveness and aggressiveness.**

**Learn to be patient with others and avoid jumping to conclusions (hoping to set up a skirmish).**

**The work place is a diverse environment; learn how to gain an appreciation for others, including eccentricities that others (as well as you) may possess.**