

00:04

Alright. I have a close, tight-knit circle of friends. We're all in different cities and we're all in different areas, from local news to city government to law, financial services ... And despite those different areas, we seem to share similar stories of workplace drama. Now, I define workplace drama as an annoyance that adds additional stress to the job. So again, it's when people get on your nerves, not the job itself. So as we're going through these stories, I'm realizing there has to be a better way for us to coexist with our coworkers without this much drama. So I created a few steps that have been working for me, and I'm happy to share them with you guys today.

00:51

Step 1: rewind and reflect, also known as, "What did I do?" I want you guys to all replay your most recent workplace drama situation in your head like a movie. Ignore all of the emotion and just focus on you. But for now, let's just think about this hypothetical: say you're on a group project, you each have your own individual assignments and then you all divide up the work. But then someone becomes unresponsive -- not answering calls, they go ghost. Then you or someone else has to now pick up that additional slack. So in a brief, small, very tiny lapse in judgment, you vent to the nearby coworker. Then all of a sudden, your ghost comes back, and they surprisingly know everything you just said.

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(Laughter)

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Now, what did I do in this situation? I vented to someone who was not my confidant. Why would I do that? Sometimes we create this unspoken bond with people that only exists in our heads. They don't owe me their discretion. I just assumed it was there. So we're not going to go down a rabbit hole, trying to figure out why they did that. It doesn't matter. They did it. But the goal in this step is self-reflection. We need to focus on what did we do so we can avoid it in the future.

02:22

Step 2: come back to reality, also known as, "It needs to stop."

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(Laughter)

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So you guys ever think about problems before you get to work? Oh -- it's just me?

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(Laughter)

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Well, I'm guilty of it. I think about all of these situations in my head, and then I get mad just thinking about it. So I'm telling myself, "No, you're just being prepared, Stacy."

02:49

(Laughter)

02:50

"You are just making sure that you can handle whatever they're about to throw at you." But you're not. What you're really doing is setting yourself up and creating this anxiety in your head that doesn't exist.

03:05

Then we also have to be careful about listening to other people's made-up scenarios. Here's what I mean. Let's say you're in the break room, and you're talking to some coworkers. Then, all of a sudden, another coworker comes in. Now, they seem to just be in deep thought -- not overly cheerful, but they're not rude. They come in, they walk out. Then the coworkers over here begin to diagnose what they feel is wrong with that person. They're saying things like, "Oh, they're just mad they didn't get the job." Or they're saying, "Oh, no, no, no -- during this season, they're just always upset." And you're sitting here like, yep, that must be it. You're listening to this as if this is facts. Meanwhile, this coworker can be in deep thought about literally anything. They could have just opened a pack of Starburst, got four yellows back-to-back, and they're just trying to figure out what happened.

04:03

(Laughter) (Applause)

04:06

But you're over here listening. And you're listening to their made-up scenario that now can impact how you choose to interact with that person throughout the day.

04:17

Whether we're creating fake stories in our head or listening to other people's made-up stories, it needs to stop. The goal in this step: stop stressing over things that haven't happened.

04:32

Alright. Step 3: vent and release. It's good to have a vent buddy. This is your coach, your cheerleader, your therapist, whatever you need them to be in the moment. This is not like that person in Step 1 that just happened to be in earshot. You have an established relationship with your vent buddy.

04:56

Now, here's another scenario. You're getting ready to tell a customer or a client something that they just don't want to hear. So, as you're in the middle of this spiel, up comes another coworker, and they interrupt you and then says the exact same thing you were saying. You can't make a scene in front of a customer. So you just have to sit back, "Mm-hmm," and just listen as they do this. And you're burning up inside. So what do we do? We go to our vent buddy. We talk about it. We get mad. And that's the time for that. Get mad. Get angry. Curse, scream, do whatever you need to do to get it out.

05:39

Now here's the hard part: you then have to switch that tone to positivity. I truly believe in positive and negative energy, and it has a way of controlling our moods throughout the day. You've got to think of things like, "OK, where do I go from here? What can I do differently?" And then, if you're the vent buddy, it's your responsibility to lead your friend back to the positive.

06:08

Now, the other hard part: you have to then apply those learnings to the situation. You can't carry that resentment around. If you do, that one-off situation now becomes a pattern. Pattern behavior is harder to ignore than a one-off situation. The goal in this step is, "Let's turn our vent session into a productive conversation."

06:38

Step 4: learn a new language, also known as, "We need to talk." Guys, I personally don't like to pick up the phone at work. I just don't. I feel like whatever you need to say to me can be an instant message or an email. That is my work language.

06:58

(Laughter)

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The only problem with that, you can't hear tone through an email. I read emails the same way I speak, so I'm pretty sure I've misinterpreted some tones before, unless I know you. So here's an example. I'm going to show you guys an email, and I want you to read it, and then I'm going to read it out loud. Alright, that was fast enough, you should have read it.

07:29

(Laughter)

07:30

"Stacy, Thank you for reaching out about my group. At this time, we will not need any additional support. Going forward, if I feel we need help, I'll ask, you won't have to reach out. Per my last email (attached below), I've outlined what I do, and what you do, so we can avoid this in the future. As always, thank you for your partnership!!"

07:51

Guys ...

07:53

(Laughter)

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That's how you read it?

07:55

(Laughter)

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Guys, there are certain words in there that if you hear or if you see in an email, it is safe to assume they typed it with their middle fingers.

08:07

(Laughter)

08:11

I didn't know it then. I know it now.

08:13

(Laughter)

08:16

I think I messed up some people's emails. They're correcting them.

08:20

(Laughter)

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With all of that said, you have to know when it is time to pick up the phone. You have to know when it is time to have a face-to-face. And these face-to-face conversations are not easy. They are difficult, but they are necessary. The goal is to try to understand the other person's perspective. So you'll start the conversation with things like, "OK, you got upset when I ..." Or you'll say things like, "OK, you already had the situation handled, and then I ..." So that way, you can see exactly where they're coming from.

08:55

Also, don't try to make people like you. We all have our own upbringings. We all have our experiences. And we all have our own communication styles. As the new generations are entering the workforce, we're also adapting to it. Meetings are now emails. Emails are now texts. Off-sites are now Skype. So as we're adjusting to that, we need to at least try to understand what type of style of communication they use. The goal in that step is to really understand their work language and accept the fact that it may be different than yours.

09:38

Step 5: recognize and protect, also known as, "We need to take a walk." So here's my last scenario from one of my teacher friends. You're about to have a meeting with a parent, and prior to it, you and a coworker, you kind of discuss it, and the coworker tells you, "It's alright, I got your back. I'm going to agree with your recommendations." So you're kind of side-eyeing them because they've burned you before, but you've had the "we need to talk," so you're like, "We're in sync now, I'm going to trust them." You go through the meeting, the parent disagrees with you, and like clockwork, the coworker agrees with the parent in front of you, making you look ridiculous. Again, we can't make a scene in front of people, right? So you've got to hold it in. And then, after the meeting, that same coworker has all the audacity, comes up to you and says, "Crazy meeting, right?"

10:38

(Laughter)

10:41

Yeah. They're testing you now. It's a test. (Laughs) So that's the perfect time to just go off, right? This is a repeat offender.

10:48

(Laughter)

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You walked away, and they came back with it.

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But we're trying to avoid workplace drama, not take a cannonball leap into it, so we have to walk away. You lead that conversation by taking the first available exit. You're not doing this for them. You're doing this for you. You have to protect your energy. Don't try to figure out why they would do this, and no more coming-to-Jesus conversations. It is what it is, they did what they did, and given the opportunity, they'd probably do it again. But you now know that. You now recognize that. So that way, you can act accordingly.

11:33

We typically try to set expectations -- our expectations -- on other people, and then get disappointed when they don't follow through. We have to learn to accept people where they are and adjust ourselves to handle those situations. The goal in this step is to recognize when it is time to professionally walk away from someone.

12:03

Guys, I realize these steps may come off as saying, "Take the high road." And people always say it. "Just take the high road." And they describe it as some elegant path of righteousness filled with rainbows and unicorns. It's not that. It's embarrassing. It's humiliating. It leaves this knot of resentment in the pit of your stomach. And as you're traveling down this amazing high road, you see billboards of things you shoulda said and things you shoulda did. You go over there and you look at the easy road, and they're chillin', not worried about a thing.

12:44

But I have to admit, the more I travel down this road, it does get a little easier. Petty situations, they don't bother me as much. I learn little nuggets here and there. And as I continue down this path, there seem to be more opportunities waiting for me. I have like-minded people who want to connect with me, projects that people want me on, leaders reaching out because they heard about

me through someone else. And the best part? The need to even look at the easy road is no longer there.

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Guys, we're not going to change the way adults act in the workplace. We are not. And for that reason, there will always be workplace drama. But if we stick to these steps and put in the work that comes with it, we can learn to avoid it.

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Guys, thank you for being my vent buddies.

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(Laughter)

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And thank you so much for your time.

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(Applause)