

Peace with Colleagues

by Robinson Malkomes

If you keep on biting and devouring each other, watch out or you will be destroyed by each other. (Gal. 5.15)

Did Paul write these words to a bunch of cannibals like the one from *The Silence of the Lambs* and its sequel, *Hannibal*? No, he wrote them to believers. Clearly, the first readers of his epistle were not exactly living peaceful Christian lives. Human relationships are not always easy even for mature Christians, especially in situations where stress abounds—like in our work environment. Stress leads us to keep other people at arm's length or avoid them at all costs. How can we make human relationships less stressful in our respective publishing houses?

One potential source of conflict is our different personal characteristics. God made each of us unique. We are not products of an assembly line. As individuals we each have our own personalities, beliefs and values.

Editors and designers apparently run under non-compatible systems. The former prefer words and text whereas the latter understand better the language of images, aesthetics and colors. Which speaks louder? Words or images? Frustration and irritation appear when people are unable to deal with the differences of opinion their unique perspectives cause.

However, differences can bring out the best in people. Effusive, warm and expansive sales people need the generally introspective and dispassionate financial controllers and vice-versa.

How can you improve the quality of relationships between different, or even incompatible, individuals in your publishing house? Here are some practical steps.

- ❑ Expect the best from your co-workers. Do not assume they are not doing their best.
- ❑ Show sincere and profound respect for them.
- ❑ Minimize other people's weaknesses. Consider others usually already know their weaknesses and do not need to be constantly reminded of them.
- ❑ Maximize other people's strengths.
- ❑ Do not gossip. Instead of discrediting or even defaming your colleagues, praise their strengths.
- ❑ Recognize other people's achievements. Express approval and/or admiration.

In addition to the previous directions, it is important to avoid defective communication. As an indispensable tool for our daily work, good communication can never be overestimated. Ignore it and you will certainly meet trouble. Crystal clear objectives, tasks, schedules, budgets, and rules are essential for any group of people working together if they are to be successful.

Think about the responsibilities attributed to the marketing people in your publishing house. How far can they go? Where does marketing end and sales begin? Job descriptions are a very useful tool to help people understand what they are expected to do. They can help your publishing to be free from the hindrances that false or undefined expectations can cause among co-workers.

Ensure your words are understood. This is a very easy and effective way to improve communication. How many times have you thought you were communicating, and later found out that your audience got a completely different message? Even at the risk of being boring or repetitive, do not assume prior knowledge on the part of your listeners. Details are not mere details! Give them a special place in your communication.

It is equally important to learn to be a good listener. Be patient as you try to decode a colleague's message. Speaking the same language is not always enough! Whenever possible, repeat what you are hearing in your own words to make sure you got the message. Misunderstandings or disagreements can be avoided if people learn to use these simple techniques for good communication.

Good human relationships involve many other aspects and demand social, emotional and spiritual maturity. Still, attention to different personal characteristics and to our communication strategies can be of great help as we try to live peaceful Christian lives in our workplace. ❖

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