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REGAINING FOOTING AFTER A CO-WORKER'S MISSTEP
 WORKWISE® BY MILDRED L. CULP

Bruce Hurwitz of Hurwitz Strategic Staffing Ltd., in New York City, once worked in a company with a recruiter with an enormous ego. A nursing home HR client liked the format Hurwitz used to propose candidates and asked the co-worker to do the same. He didn't. She insisted on speaking with Hurwitz, who did the work and landed an interview for the candidate. The other recruiter was worried about losing his commission and called an emergency meeting. He accepted no blame.

Informal partnerships are a hallmark of today's workplace. Professionalism presumes trust. What happens when a co-worker missteps, leaving you to pick up the pieces? Based in Berkeley, Calif., speaker Elayne Savage, The Queen of Rejection, advocates taking action immediately. "Avoid the loss of productivity that comes from dwelling, agonizing and taking it personally," she says.

INTENTIONALITY

What did the co-worker intend? Licensed psychologist Steven Lurie of Lurie Executive Development Inc., in Lawrence, N.Y., is an executive coach who helps people understand the motivations of others and how to respond appropriately to the company's culture. Before taking action, consider whether this behavior is typical or atypical, whether you've seen it before, Lurie advises. Do a little investigating. "It's always prudent to find out if you are the first person who's ever experienced this kind of treatment," says Katherine Crowley of K Squared Enterprises Inc., in New York City.

When you talk it over, "make the person understand exactly why you're upset," Lurie suggests. "Decide whether they 'get it.'" Listen for a sincere apology. Crowley thinks that you're likely to receive one. She observes that "bringing the misstep to the colleague's attention will usually result in profound apologies and a

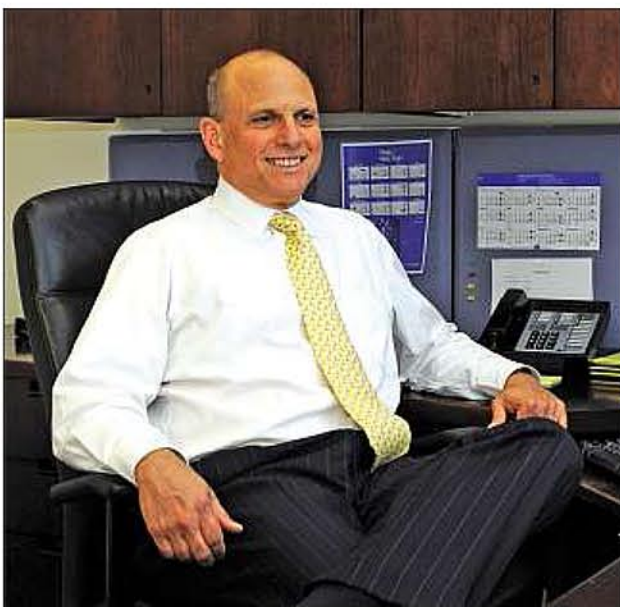
conscious attempt to rectify the situation."

The person who intends to harm you "usually denies any wrongdoing or tries to frame it in a way that minimizes the offense," she continues. What about the individual who gives conflicting signals with a seemingly sincere apology? While the first may seek harm, the second, according to Lurie, is out for himself.

Lurie points out that "the ability to learn from the experience is essential. Some people still don't get it, which means you know what to expect. Be very aware of the risk you take on when you work with them." He adds that if the same hazards recur, you must accept the person as is, regardless of your need for him to act differently.

Hurwitz reports that the firm did what Lurie recommends – structuring the work so that it met the firm's needs. Meanwhile, everyone "made the other recruiter feel like he was still part of the team but were certain that he would not be able to produce," according to Hurwitz. When co-workers are well-meaning and able to learn, he comments, "helping them fix the error teaches them what not to do and how to avoid such mistakes in the future. More importantly, it builds team work. And most importantly, I always tell people that it is never the crime that gets you. It's always the cover-up."

However, Lurie believes that cutting off from the person isn't an



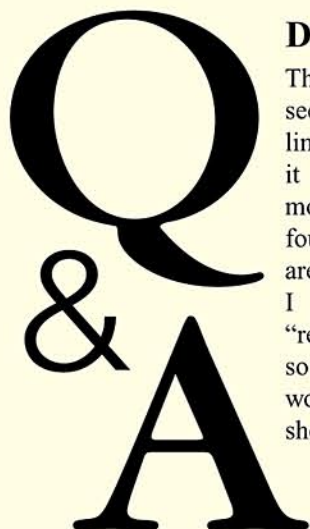
Executive coach Steven Lurie maintains that, with a little wisdom, you can find ways to keep working with a co-worker who's out for himself. Lurie is a licensed psychologist at Lawrence, N.Y.'s Lurie Executive Development Inc.

PHOTO COURTESY OF VLADIMIR GITT

option, even if you find the behavior extremely objectionable: "Ending a working relationship is likely to be counterproductive. Although a few people might pat you on the back, most will perceive you as over-reacting or retaliatory. This will put your behavior in the spotlight. Stay engaged while minimizing your exposure to the undermining behavior." In other words, don't retreat from your work or social interactions. The obligation to complete your tasks and maintain good working relationships doesn't slip away.

Be on guard in relation to the co-worker, Lurie advises: "Keep in mind who you are dealing with; act accordingly; and don't take it personally."

Dr. Mildred L. Culp is a syndicated columnist. ©2010 Passage Media.



Dear Dr. Culp,

The sheer number of job seekers and seemingly limited openings make it difficult for me to stay motivated, although I've found that the openings aren't as limited as I expected. Often the "requirements" listed are so specific that I feel I wouldn't qualify. How should I handle them?

Qualified

Dear Qualified,

Because you are, job hunt like someone who is. When you see specific requirements you think you don't meet, apportion the time you'd spend applying to some other form of job hunting. If an employer wants a person with purple toes and a blue nose, you can be certain he'll find one.

You've found that there are openings. Maximize what you learn by analyzing them in a group. What do they have in common with your background? What do they need that you keep forgetting to mention? Go after advertised jobs that make sense for you, but spend most of your time finding competitors who might need the same skills and experience. Also, take breaks. *mle.*

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Dr. Mildred L. Culp welcomes your questions at culp@workwise.net. ©2010 Passage Media.