

Empower Your Employees to Improve Organizational Results



I've been an Arbinger facilitator at my school, George Washington High School in Ogden, UT, for about a year now. I've learned many lessons as I've delivered outward mindset training to my coworkers, but there's one in particular that I'd like to share.

Namely:

Empowering people to give hard feedback can bring unexpected and hugely valuable improvements to an organization.

I'd known this lesson intellectually for a while. But I didn't deeply-viscerally-come to believe in its value until someone on my staff taught it to me.

This person was my secretary. After attending one of my outward mindset workshops, she approached me for a talk. The training had given her the confidence and language to tell me some things she'd hesitated to say before. Because the training emphasized the importance of understanding our impact on others, she felt newly comfortable telling me how some of my decisions were negatively affecting her ability to execute

her responsibilities.

Importantly, she gave this feedback with the mindset of, “I want to share the effects of your decisions on our organization’s performance” rather than the victimized, “You’re hurting me!” perspective that is so easy for anyone to fall into.

How I Created Problems

One area where my decisions caused problems involved transfer students. Many students enroll in my school during the middle of the year. I wanted these students to quickly become familiar with their new school and hit the ground running, so I decided to start requiring a full-day orientation process. If students did not complete the orientation day, we would send them back to their previous school.

I didn’t collaborate with anyone on this decision. I made it behind a closed door in my office, feeling strongly that it was an important procedure to implement.

Inevitably, some students skipped or did not complete the orientation day. So we transferred them back.

In our post-workshop talk, the secretary helped me understand the extra paperwork, time, and consternation my orientation requirement created. The process to officially un-enroll a student from one school and enroll them in another is, I learned, quite lengthy. By requiring students to complete orientation or return to their old school, I caused both schools’ secretaries not only to go through the trouble of officially transferring a student, but also to reverse the process the very next day for any students who missed orientation!

I hadn’t even considered how much extra work my decision created for my secretary, her colleagues, and her counterparts

at other schools.

Finding a Solution That Works for Everyone

Later, I met with my secretary again to find a better way. We agreed that just one change would do the trick: we would not start the official transfer process until after the orientation day. It was such a simple solution—and a very quick meeting—but with my self-focused inward mindset, I hadn't even thought to ask how the process I'd designed might impact anyone else. I simply came up with an idea and gave the new directive about how things would work.

Interestingly, if my secretary had held an inward mindset, she likely would have seen me as nothing more than someone to blame for her extra work. By turning outward, however, she saw that my ultimate goals were also her ultimate goals. She understood that suffering in silence wouldn't allow us to align those goals, so she spoke up. And I was thrilled she called me out—that she gave me the constructive but difficult feedback I needed to hear—for the good of the organization.