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Relationships

I'm right and you're wrong

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Purpose

This strategy is really useful in a problematic relationship, either professional or personal. It requires the usual comfortable room, plus two chairs, a small table and a photo frame. The strategy will help your client get more powerful in the relationship, increasing his/her understanding of communication.

Description

This powerful strategy is a metaphor to help clients understand the relativity of truth. Two people can be talking about the same thing and have different points of view, especially when they are both looking at the same thing and seeing different realities. On the way to success, it is not rare to have communication difficulties.

I remember a difference of opinion between a human resources manager and an operations manager on what to do about a staff member. They were arguing about the right thing to do. Both had different understandings and experiences with this person. The operations manager used the strategy to help sort the problem out and find a reasonable solution, beneficial for both the staff member and the company.

Process

Your client has a problem with someone about something. It can be personal or professional. Ask your client to sit in a chair (Chair 1), opposite an empty chair (Chair 2). Chair 2 is the chair where the 'other' person is supposedly sitting. In between your client and Chair 2, you put an object, i.e. the photo frame on the small table. You decide which side the client will see from Chair 1, but it's essential that he/she sees only one side, either the picture or the back of the frame. Ask the client to describe what he/she sees from Chair 1.

After he/she does this, ask your client to go and sit on Chair 2, representing the other person in the situation, and ask your client to describe the object again from the 'other' person's perspective.

When the task is complete, ask your client to 'step out' of the situation (out of the two chairs) and tell you what he/she sees from this position. Ask the client if he/she understands the different points of view of these two people. Invite him/her to sit again in his/her chair (Chair 1) and revisit the problem. Check if your client has already changed his/her mind about the whole situation. What has he/she learned from it? If the client does not get it yet completely, ask him/her to go back to the other chair (Chair 2) and look at the situation from the other point of view. Then, seated back in Chair 1, ask the client to describe the way he/she will manage the situation now. If the person is still not clear about a new approach, start again by asking the client to describe the photo frame from each chair. If both perspectives are understood by your client, he/she will find a new way of dealing with the situation and the other person. Some clients are very quick to move on while others will need to go back and forth from Chair 1 to Chair 2 a few times to find a way to move forward, to find a new approach incorporating the other person's position and point of view.

The stronger person in a situation is the most flexible, the one able to step into the other person's shoes and to understand another perspective. To be able to use this

strategy is a valuable skill to have in terms of managing relationships in the workplace.

Pitfalls

None.