

“It’s nothing personal. It’s just business.”

BY KAY CANNON | Last night I was watching a television movie about a successful woman who unexpectedly finds her life turned upside down. In one scene we see her smug and condescending boss telling her that he has decided to give her job to a younger co-worker. As she stands there fighting back tears of shock and disbelief, her boss adds, in a sickly sweet and apologetic voice, “It’s nothing personal. It’s just business.”

It’s just business. Aaarrghhh!!!! Who are we trying to kid? Business *is* personal. If you don’t believe me, imagine how boring the hit television show *The Apprentice* would be if it was just business and nothing personal. It’s the interaction of personalities that creates the drama and captures our attention.

Let’s get real. You can’t take the personal out of business anymore than you can take the water out of rain. Business cannot exist without people – customers, workers and suppliers. All business interactions lead to some type of personal reaction. Our personal reactions range from good to bad to indifferent. Underneath our calm, cool and collected faces, business is personal.

So, if that’s the case, why do so many of us continue to pretend that business is not

personal? The answer is simple. We are cowards. We are playing a grown-up version of kindergarten finger pointing. We are afraid to come face-to-face with the personal impact of our business interactions. By blaming business, we avoid personal involvement, responsibility or accountability for the situation. By declaring that the situation is not personal, we deny, discount and disrespect the truth of the other person’s experience. We assume that our perspective is the unarguable truth.

To stop the business blame game, ask yourself:

What am I choosing not to communicate in this situation? Many times what we choose to leave out of our communication is more powerful than what we do choose to communicate. When we don’t communicate in a complete and honest manner, we create gaps in other people’s knowledge and understanding. These folks then fill in the gaps by guessing. And, more often than not, their best guess is still not accurate. This is especially true when it comes to other people guessing the motivations behind our actions.

What is my responsibility for the situation?

It’s human nature to protect ourselves during times of perceived danger. Don’t let

this desire make you blind to your own part in the situation. The most respected and effective leaders are those courageous people who are not afraid to take personal responsibility.

What is my own personal reaction in this situation? Blaming occurs when we don’t trust ourselves to effectively deal with the potential consequences of our actions. We second guess our power and abilities. Look your fear in the eye and you will discover a courage more powerful than your self-doubt.

What am I afraid will happen if I acknowledge and respect the other person’s feelings? When we are afraid, we sometimes try to make ourselves feel more powerful by diminishing the people around us. Disrespecting, dismissing or denying the reality of someone else’s feelings destroys trust and appreciation.

The next time you’re tempted to finger point your way out of a tough situation, substitute courage for cowardice. Be respectful. Be responsible. Be accountable. Be the heartbeat of great business. ■

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