DIALEXIS

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THE POWER OF NEGATIVE PEOPLE

*Negative people penetrate organizations daily and with the cunningness of a predator they dismantle cultures slowly until it's too late. Admired corporations become that way due to the high expectations they have from their leadership team. **The Power Of Negative People** reveals the danger of this virus and suggests what can be done to build a constructive culture.*

THE POWER OF NEGATIVE PEOPLE
By D. Hibbard

There's a saying that one negative person can influence 10 positive people. It would seem the other way around; that 10 positive people would be able to influence one negative person, but that's not always the case. The power of negativity is strong and compelling. In fact, many of us gravitate toward negative individuals without realizing why, or noticing the influence they have on our lives. It happens in the office, the company coffee room, through emails, during inter-office calls or in the copy room; it happens in the field, behind closed doors or out in the open; negativity seems to be everywhere. You would think that an organization has hundreds of negative people within its ranks, but not so, it's generally just a few individuals within the organization engaging in gossip and negative talk. This is why negative people have so much power. They sneak up on us and begin with subtle comments; with secrets, gossip or complaints about the organization or individuals within it. Many times we don't intend to get caught up in the negativity, we just do. Then, over a short period of time the negativity becomes infectious and we find ourselves adding to the discussions. Before we know it, we've become a prisoner of negativity—a victim of its subtle powers of captivation. Take the new employee for example. They almost always enter an organization with a positive attitude. The negative person sees them as prey and slowly *helps* them. They inform the *newbie* about the organization's ineffectiveness or the ineffective nature of its management. Soon enough, they capture their victim. It's a tragedy if you think about it, because negative people have the power to destroy dreams and potential. So, what can you do to avoid the negative individual? Here are a few ideas:

1. **UNDERSTAND WHAT NEGATIVITY IS:** Negativity isn't necessarily someone who is struggling with the company or an individual within the company – everyone struggles with company policies or individuals at times. They may have issues with the boss and need to seek advice. Here's an example: If someone said to me – *"I am really frustrated with the company, I tried to talk to John and he just isn't getting back to me, what do you think I should do?"* I would support that person and wouldn't consider the outreach as negative. But if the same person said, *"I am really frustrated with the company, I talked to John and the guy never gets back to me, he's such an idiot. This entire company is a joke. I'm over this place!"* That's a different story…clearly negative. So you can see the distinction. Gossip about others or constant complaining about the organization isn't what I am interested in being a part of – It's clearly negative. My partner and I wrote a book called "The Canoe Theory™" which is a great resource on the topic of negativity. You may want to check it out if you're unsure of how to deal with a negative person.

2. **DOUBLE CHECK YOURSELF:** Think of it this way, if someone was a thief – who would they tell? You know the answer; they would most likely go to another thief, right? If someone was looking to share a discriminatory joke or story, who would they tell the joke to? Again, the answer is clear, someone who agrees with the joke or joke teller.

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So, you need to ask yourself why negative people come to you, do they perceive you as negative? If negative people can go to anyone they want to impart their negativity - why would they choose you? Double-check your own reputation and you may find you need to restate your position to those who come to you with negativity. Let me give you an example; I used to tell jokes about people of color, culture, gender etc. I thought the jokes were funny and honestly I never really thought that I was hurting anyone or doing anything wrong. It was just how I was raised and how the environment I surrounded myself with was and after all, everyone seemed to do the same. I guess in a way it made me feel popular, I would tell the joke and people would laugh and that translated to me that I was liked. As I matured over time, I began to realize how I was *showing up* to others. I decided that telling jokes or stories about gender or color etc was of little value to the world. I began to realize I was propagating – negative beliefs. It was just that simple. Don't get me wrong, I'm a street guy, but joke telling about someone's culture, ethnicity or gender just wasn't what I wanted to put into the world any longer. So I stopped. That was many years ago. Then out of the blue, I received a call from a past acquaintance who I hadn't talked to in years, he said he was talking to an old friend of mine and my old friend said I would love the joke he was about to tell me. He said my friend told him, call Hib, he'll love that joke. Well, he told the joke before I could say a word; it was a very quick a one-liner type joke – very discriminatory. Now, remember, I hadn't' heard from this guy in years! He quickly told the joke and laughed as he said… *gotta go.* It was that fast. I didn't even get a chance to state my shift on the issue. After I hung up, I pondered what to do. Should I call him back and tell him how I feel, let it go or write him a note…or what? Then it hit me, most likely I'll never hear from that guy again, the one I should be calling is the guy who recommended me as the friend who would like the joke. After all, he is a friend that I see occasionally, but it dawned on me that I had never updated him on my transition to a new way of thinking. It was interesting though; I realized that I had cast my

reputation in the marketplace and it was still with me. So, I called my friend and told him that I had been remiss in not informing him of how I had taken a different view on the subject. He was grateful and appreciated me informing him. After, I felt good about making the call, and I hoped it had an impact on him as well. Don't get me wrong, I'm not crossing the street to tell others how they should think or behave. I just want to take care of my own ground, change the way I conduct myself and start to put positive into the world.

3. MOVE AWAY FROM NEGATIVE PEOPLE: It isn't as difficult as you may think. If you don't have much of a relationship you simply avoid them—that's it! Change your patterns. Don't eat lunch with them, discontinue your breaks with them, and find reasons why you can't talk or meet. If you do care about them, then *stand for them* by telling them they would be more powerful if *that* were not a part of their behavior. Remember silence on a topic is often interpreted as acceptance.

4. UNDERSTAND THAT NEGATIVITY DRAINS YOUR POWER TO EXCEL: By focusing on the positive aspects of your organization you move closer to your own power source and you are guaranteed to improve your performance. Negativity is a major drain. The time you spend engaged in negative talk about the company or someone within its ranks is time that you could be spending on building your talent and reputation. Negativity is clearly the virus that destroys every individual's potential.

5. REALIZE THAT ALL COMPANIES HAVE PROBLEMS: Most negative people focus on what's wrong with a company or its management. What you need to realize is that all companies have problems. No company is ever perfect, and no company ever will be. Instead, focus on the good your organization offers. If you concentrate on the negative, you sacrifice your own personal power. A negative focus will drain your positive storage tank; it slowly depletes your constructive energy. Give the organization a break (including management!) Realize that if you were in a management position you too would be a target. You may believe that you would do a better job, but even if you performed well, you would likely be judged harshly. Instead, consider supporting management. You might say you can't—that "the company is far past the point of any help." If you honestly believe that, then have the integrity to move on. Find a new organization where you can contribute and be happy, but UNDER NO CIRCUMSTANCES STAY AND UNDERMINE THE INTEGRITY OF THE ORGANIZATION TO WHICH YOU PRESENTLY BELONG. It's unfair to your colleagues who wish to make a success of things. In the meantime, drop the gossip – which also takes integrity. Besides, when you gossip you become a part of the problem.

6. UNDERSTAND WHY PEOPLE ARE NEGATIVE: Sometimes it's because they themselves can't excel due to their own self-infecting negativism or it's something in their history, the way they were raised. In many cases, negative people may be unable to admit that the *real reason* they don't get ahead is attributed to their own attitude, and the fact that they see themselves as victims. They seek to deny the truth or sustain what they perceive as the truth and capture others who are willing to listen to them rationalize their own story. That's a key statement: "Others who are willing to listen." That means you. They seek *you* because they realize that you will add to their opinions. You get to choose…participate or not.

7. TAKE 100% RESPONSIBILITY: Make a decision to either confront negative people or tell them you can no longer listen when their conversations turn to gossip or negative talk, or as I said, move away from them. If you decide to confront them, tell them that it's nothing personal, but that you want to move toward the positive. If they judge you harshly, (which they may), then they aren't a friend you need in the first place. Make a decision to change your own attitude and gravitate towards people who see the organization and its possibilities as positive. If the problem is too complex for you to handle, seek outside advice from someone you trust and who has experience in this area of thinking or as I mentioned, get a copy of **The Canoe Theory**™ – it will support you.