

By Ajay Wahi



Somehow we are in the habit of starting critical meetings (client complaints, delivery schedules not met, quality problems, disruption in production, product launch delays, incorrect research, poor financial analysis etc.) on a serious note, and with worried faces, trying to avoid meeting anyone's eyes. In fact, it is almost expected that senior level fraternity in any industry will enjoy seeing some gloomy faces around. What is a boss if s/he can't scare others!

Jokes apart, I have observed that the more frightened people are at these meetings, the longer the meetings take, because a lot of time is spent trying to get back to normal so they can contribute meaningfully! Also, after dealing with so much fear, I leave it to you to imagine what the quality of output would be. Generally, it would be safe to say that the quality of output would be inversely proportional to the amount of fear.

I have learned to start critical meetings by asking people how they feel about the problem we have gathered to discuss. Normally the response is that they are feeling bad/low/dejected etc. This allows everyone to share their negative feelings without fear, and without any responsibility being attributed to anyone for the problem. Once the sharing is over, it is time to switch modes.

I pose the problem as a challenge and then ask them: "Do you want to do routine stuff or do you want work on challenges?" They shoot the answer back at me, choosing the challenge. The mood now becomes upbeat, productive, and people are ready to come up with solutions to problems, rather than being fearful and dull. And the brainstorming always throws up some really innovative ways to tackle the issue, most of which may not have surfaced if the moods were low!

We need to be aware that SMEs have 1000s of ideas burning to take centre-stage. In the urge to become larger and more profitable quicker and faster, everything seems to be urgent. And obviously in that drive, or rather over-drive, to achieve results, employees end up making mistakes.

Mistakes are made at large companies as well, but the cost of mistakes at SMEs is far larger, as SMEs don't carry any flab! So SMEs need to have a series of meetings to understand the causes for these mistakes – the last thing you would want is extended meetings and poor output due to the scared faces present at the meeting. So, please do clean up the fearful environment to make meetings more positive and productive.

However, you need to be cautious when implementing this learning. Don't overdo it because it would be very damaging for the company if employees start taking critical issues lightly.

The main objective is that while you have to make employees realize the seriousness of an issue, it is equally important to make them comfortable so that meetings are vibrant.

It is vital not to trivialise critical issues!

Avoid the blame game as each employee wants to protect himself/herself.

What Is It For Me

Employees are more concerned about finding a solution to the problem rather than saving their skin.

Mistakes become opportunities for learning which can steer SMEs to higher scales of revenues and profits and a better corporate image

About the author



Mr. Ajay Wahi has two and half decades of all-round experience in all areas of organisation functioning like general management, sales and marketing , finance, HR, software development, brand building, team work etc.

He has been working for SMEs for the last 15 years. With all this experience , the author has managed to fast-track the growth of all the SMEs he has worked for. It is these experiences which he has put in this book: and the award for BEST SME of year goes to... Mr. Wahi shares the insights of his book in a series of columns through Small Enterprise India.com

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