

"The Three Rs:"

A powerful simple technique to stay out of conflict

Content Subject: Conflict Management, Team Building • Reading time: 4 minutes

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It's difficult to remain calm and centered when a co-worker is peering over your shoulder trying to make sure you complete your assignment accurately, or when a well-meaning family member is watching over your plate to make sure you don't stray from your diet, or a constituent is preaching to you about how she would do a better job.

"Here, let me show you an easier way," or "Do you really think that will work?" are phrases that many people hear as, "Boy, you're really pretty stupid, aren't you?" Our blood boils, fists clench, and before we can count to ten, we say things like, "Do I look stupid?" or "Who asked you anyway?" The results of such interactions go nowhere pleasant.

Having someone tell you how to do something "correctly" (when you weren't seeking his advice) is one of the top reasons for interpersonal conflict. There is nothing you can do to "unhear" the words; therefore the solution must rely in changing how you react to them. So, the real question becomes, "How does one avoid being pulled into an unwanted argument and — at the same time — respectfully explain to the other person that you would like them to stop doing that?"

The good news and the bad news.

If the person is simply out to share his own special brand of dark sunshine with you, in other words, spoil your day; there isn't a whole lot you can do except grin and bear it. (Well, at least you can bear it.) However, assuming you are merely the recipient of unwanted, well-intentioned advice, one method that helps diffuse the situation is utilizing a simple tool, "The Three Rs".

Step 1: Recognize the intent of the person, not the action

There is an old Irish proverb, "The road to hell is paved with good intentions." Assuming the person offering the advice is someone with whom you can usually get along (or at you usually least try to), the first assignment is to slow down in your reaction long enough to understand that in reality, he or she just wants to make sure you're successful at what you're doing. That is the real underlying reason why he is directing your actions.

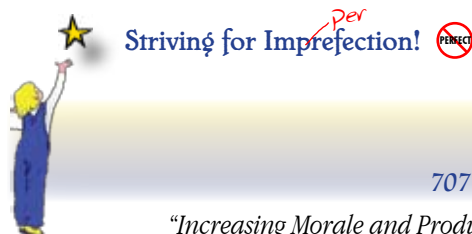
For example, "Should you be eating that?" could be the way that he is trying to make sure you get to lose the weight you said you wanted to drop. He wants you to be successful, but doesn't know what he can do. Conversely, "Here, let me show you a better way," is just another way of saying, "I can show you how to save some time (or make it easier for you)."

If we can focus on the *intention*, rather than the words or *actions*, we're half way there.

Step 2: Reflect how you feel about the statement

Resolving conflict is a door that swings both ways. We have to take some ownership of the situation in order to fix it. After all, there wouldn't be a disagreement if there was only one person involved, would there?

Therefore, it's vital to understand that no one makes anyone else feel anything. We choose (or we have learned) to react in a certain fashion to certain situations. Others might not know what their comments trigger in you, so — if you want them to



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stop doing the action in the future — you have to tell them. Without that knowledge, they do not even have the option of changing. If you don't explain why his or her action bothers you, he doesn't understand. It's sometimes risky to express your feelings, but the reality is, others can tell anyway.

So, the second step in preventing these unwanted intrusions in the future is to *reflect* how you feel about it.

(If you don't feel comfortable or safe discussing your feelings with particular people, you can skip step two and jump to step three. However, in personal, important, close relationships, it's an important component.)

Step 3: *Redirect* the behavior

If your response is simply to shout, "Leave me alone, I'm not an idiot!" he will — for possibly a longer time than you wish. In addition, it's never pleasant to share working or living spaces with someone with whom you are angry. Therefore, *redirect* him — give him something else to do that might actually help you, while satisfying his desire to be part of your life (or situation).

Putting the "3 Rs" into action: An example

Let's assume the problem was someone trying to tell you how to do a project at work, here's how the "Three Rs" could be used.

Suppose you were trying to load the new copier and were having trouble getting the tray to slide out. Your co-worker, Jeff, approaches and says, "You're doing that wrong, let me show you how to do it right."

You reply, "Thank you Jeff. I really appreciate your willingness to help (*recognizes* the intent). However, it's important to me to learn how to do this correctly so I'm not always having to wait for someone else to help; if you do it, I won't understand how this thing goes together (*reflecting* how you feel). Therefore, I'd like it better if you were available for me if I had any questions later. That would be great!" (*redirecting* the behavior)

By going through that process, Jeff is appreciated for his attempt, he understands you a little better, and you and he get to avoid a big blow out.

Remember the "Three Rs:" Recognize. Reflect. Redirect. It might not always work. But when it does, it's worth the minor effort it takes.

About the writer:

Scott "Q" Marcus refers to himself as a "THINspirational Speaker and Recovering Perfectionist" He lost 70 pounds in 1994 and now uses the lessons he learned to help individuals and organizations playfully increase morale, improve communication, and heighten productivity during challenging times. He is a syndicated columnist, award-winning speaker, and the author of three books. He has spoken to associations and individuals across the country. This article can be downloaded from www.scottqmarcus.com/articles.html and he can be contacted for consulting or speaking at scottq@ScottQMarcus.com or 707.442.6243