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Was That All You Wanted?

Skills and Professional Development



Over the Christmas holidays, my husband and I decided to host a small party. On the invitation, we listed it as a “come and go” affair. We held it on Christmas Eve so that people could stop by before, after or in lieu of Christmas Eve service. Calling it “open,” we thought we ensured that we would not have too many people at any one time. What we did not consider was that some people would enjoy themselves so much that they would “come and STAY.” Nonetheless, it ended up being a successful evening. As we started our post-party clean up ritual, we were both amused and delighted that people found our home so welcoming that they stayed as long as they did.

It got me to thinking about people and circumstances that have resulted in the phrase “wearing out your welcome.” Erma Bombeck once said: “House guests should be regarded as perishables: Leave them out too long and they go bad.” It is a humorous but honest take on our capacity for dealing with people as well as circumstances. Traditionally, this wry perspective is applied to family holidays or vacations; but what about in the context of one’s job or company position.

Have you worn out your welcome? Do you spend more time talking about what is wrong with the organization instead of working on ways to fix it? Instead of a breath of fresh air have you turned into spoiled fruit? Are spending your water cooler moments or “happy” hours airing dirty company laundry? If so, then it is probably time to make a change.

I had a friend who had been with her company for many years through a few different supervisors. Over the years, the company had its ups and downs and she had hers along with it, but for about a year she seemed incredibly unhappy. There wasn’t a single time that we met for lunch that she wasn’t upset over changes in her organization. I kept encouraging her to look around for something else. And she did, albeit half-heartedly. She suffered from the same common weakness we all do at times: better the devil you know than the devil you don’t.

We all have a tendency at times to believe that it's far better to deal with work misery that you know about rather than a potentially worse situation. But what if a new situation or new set of circumstances could offer more? Are we actually more afraid of being up to the task? Are we more afraid of unknown but potential success as opposed to knowable constraints? Many times, we hold the keys to our career cage. Funny how people only free themselves from that cage after a death, divorce or disaster.

What if, instead of waiting for the shoe to drop before we decide to take the next step or the big leap, we did it before? Maybe you don't need to leave your job but maybe you need to try for a different position in the organization. Maybe you need to volunteer to head up the next big project. Maybe you need to put together a new game plan and present it to the board. Or maybe you just need to turn around the morale and attitude of your department by starting with your own.

Be the first to know when you have worn out your welcome, before you start smelling like sour grapes. Decide right now to be more and do more. Whatever that "thing" is that will make a difference for you is something only you can initiate.

As the poet Genine Lentine said: "The question I am asked daily by the world; was that all you wanted?"

Well, was it?

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