

THE MANY FACES OF AGGRESSION

GOALS:

1. To share knowledge about the recognition and control of aggressive behaviors.
2. To identify behaviors indicating aggressive behaviors.
3. To provide leadership encouragement and behaviors to effectively address and reduce aggression.

Aggression (overt or covert) is often referred to as a violent or forceful behavior of pursuit toward one's aims, interests, or goals. Aggression is usually directed toward harming another person, animal, property, or object. There is often a disregard for others' rights or an energetic pursuit of one's own goal(s) without the consideration of the other person(s).

Research has shown that a person participating in aggressive behavior(s) does not usually reduce future tendencies of aggression. Without a leader's recognition and appropriate response, the aggressive behavior of another person is reinforced and will continue to emerge as a probable recurring behavior to repeatedly interfere with personal relationships and/or organizational administrative standards.

THE THREE FORMS OF HUMAN AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIORS

1. Reactive Expressive Aggression—A verbal and physical aggression/attack is present. This behavior seems to come from nowhere and the person exhibits dramatic emotions.
2. Reactive Inexpressive Aggression—Hostility is evident. This unfriendly behavior indicates the person does not like something.
3. Proactive Relational Aggression—A harmful behavior that can break human relationships and is intended to harm. This includes malicious rumors, intentional isolation, name-calling, etc. Often the behaviors require planning to perform/act out the intended behavior.

Recognizing overt or covert aggression and the hidden meanings behind such behavior and verbal remarks is the responsibility of a leader! Managing such behavior is a form of leadership astuteness—resulting in a quick ability to understand and respond to the situation.

CAUSES OF AGGRESSION PER RESEARCH

Aggression potentially can be caused by many or a combination of factors and shows a wide variation in extent and variation in different people.

1. **Biological:** Genetics cause hormonal imbalance, pain, or brain development. Children exposed to high levels of androgens before birth were found to be significantly more aggressive than their siblings. (Bell & Hepper, 1987--Edward O. Wilson, 1978 --Konrad Lorenz Harvard, 1974).
2. **Psychological:** Mental health conditions/disorders cause depression, anger, frustration, anxiety disorder, bipolar disorder, schizophrenia, antisocial personality disorder, or manipulation. In many cases and some situations, it is agreed that psychological aggressive behavior is learned.
3. **Environmental:** Family, existing culture, experiencing environmental happenings, learning to be aggressive as an outcome of an aggressive environment, experiencing a lifestyle with a high level of violence, or the need for learning and using survival techniques are all environmental stressors.

Some instances act together to instigate aggression in the environment. Personal readiness cues, such as personal anger together with environmental cues of accepting aggression provide an environment for aggressive behavior. (Leonard Berkowitz, 1978).

4. **Frustration:** The Frustration Research and Hypothesis Research says that aggression is always the consequence of frustration—and that frustration always leads to some form of psychological aggression and

acting out, if suitable cues are present. Frustration may involve negative behavior such as withdrawal, apathy, hopelessness, and displaced behavior--- such as going home and kicking the dog, as only one type of behavior. Even so—frustration can also lead to positive behaviors such as efforts to reach a goal! (John Dollard et.al, 1939)

5. Fear: Fear of possible outcomes, potential change, or concern over outcomes may cause anxiety or stress.
6. Medications: Some medications can contribute to aggressive behaviors.
7. Temperature: Extreme heat during work hours or work expectations.

THE AGGRESSION & MANIPULATION CONNECTION

Manipulation is a significant form of psychological aggression, whereby a person uses aggressive tactics to gain control over someone else. It is intended to meet personal needs while disregarding the rights and needs of others. There is aggressive maneuvering for special consideration. Attempts at presenting perceived reasons for personal behavior are common.

Manipulative behavior is a common happening with a narcissistic personality (a disorder in which a person has an inflated sense of self-importance.) The attempts can be very subtle, but the specific behavioral attempts to control another person often exhibit one or more of the following manipulative behaviors:

Gaslighting: Trying to make another person question their sense of reality, judgment, and twisting the facts resulting in another person/victim questioning the reality of his/her world. It is often used to isolate and control a victim by twisting facts, appearing sympathetic, or misrepresenting the truth. Over time the victim of

gaslighting feels insecure and starts to question reality and trust in the world and happenings lessen.

Playing the Victim: A person positions him/herself as the person being wronged or makes comments of helplessness. The person plays the helpless victim to have others feel sorry for them to avoid taking responsibility for their actions. Lying and misrepresentation of a situation(s) are used for sympathy.

Projection: A person's feelings are placed onto another person. The problem and the blame always belong to someone else.

Love Bombing: A person is pulled into a relationship through grandiose gestures of affection—all of which represent manipulation to establish a trust to encourage the victim to stay with the person.

Hoovers: Once emotional space occurs between two people, there is an attempt to make the victim feel guilty or responsible for the identified problem(s). All sorts of emotional attempts are made to control the victim.

Smear Campaign: This involves the spreading of lies that harm a person's reputation which decreases emotional connections needed with others.

Triangulates: A technique that involves creating tension or conflicts between people and groups which makes another person feel powerful.

Passive Aggressive Behavior: An indirect (rather than direct) effort through words or behavior to address personal negative feelings.

Lies: An untrue statement that may or may not be believed.

Isolates: A lack of personal social interaction witnessed in nonresponse to verbal messages or requests for human conduct.

Denies: A state in which a person refuses to admit the existence or truth of something.

Shaming: A humiliation or imposed distress directed toward another person showing wrong or foolish behavior.

Blames: An assigning of responsibility for a fault or wrongdoing to someone/something else.

Withholding Information: (Knowledge-Hiding/Hoarding Information/Refusing to Provide Information). An act of a person intentionally keeping information from others.

Exaggerates: Represents something to be bigger, better, or worse than it is.

PASSIVE AGGRESSION

Passive aggressive behavior is often an overlooked and unrecognized pattern of expressing negative feelings indirectly, instead of openly dealing with their feelings of aggression. Feelings are hidden and covertly and indirectly expressed. This behavior is often expressed in procrastination, forgetting or missing deadlines, subtle digs of sarcasm, giving back-handed compliments, ignoring a person, indirectly refusing a request, or forgetfulness relating to important calendar dates and information.

MANAGING AGGRESSION

As a leader, recognizing and understanding the possible causes of aggression/manipulation provides the basis for understanding, confronting, and encouraging more constructive thoughts and behavior by others. Sometimes taking time to say out loud to the person exhibiting the aggression the behavior you see or hear without labeling the behavior as aggression helps the person to recognize what others see in the behavior of concern. A contractual verbal or written agreement with the person might be the interaction that says the behavior must change for the personal benefit of both the person exhibiting aggression and the stability of the organization or situation. Such professional intervention required of the aggressor for a more positive alteration in behavior usually helps to deter future aggressive events.

Dimensions of Managing Aggression

Physical dimension: If a person has dependent behavior or a sense of helplessness, encourage the person to assume responsibility for his/her behavior by first explaining the behavior or requesting a reduction in the exhibited behavior.

Emotional dimension: Establish clear, firm, and consistent expectations with their associated limits. Inform all individuals within the same area of the person so there are no feelings of discrimination or divisiveness.

Intellectual dimension: A history regarding the lack of personal motivation to change aggressive behavior may not be present—especially if the aggression is longstanding or in some way reinforced; therefore, it often decreases personal motivation to change, for the better, the aggressive behavior. Refusing to participate in an inappropriate conversation and (instead) making a

recommendation regarding the content of the conversation is often helpful. Discussing past behaviors that were not helpful, useful, or constructive and identifying a more successful future behavior(s) in a similar circumstance is sometimes useful.

Spiritual dimension: If the person involves consistently a specific religious representative, the plan of assistance (care plan or behavioral expectations) for more positive and less aggression is to be discussed with the representative to maintain a unified plan.

IN CLOSING: A leader with intellectual awareness, the ability to recognize overt and covert aggression, and the ability to calmly confront and set future positive behavioral goals with others, often helps others increase positive lifetime non-aggressive skills as well as promote organizational success. The ability, as a leader, to calmly practice within the realm of setting a consistent example of nonaggression requires personal leadership calmness and stability amid what is, at times, chaotic aggression. To be such a leader promotes leadership success and organizational stability! Once leadership intellect and a leader's management abilities related to aggression are recognized by organizational associates, the path to organizational productivity increases and overt aggression diminishes.

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