



Respect.

Discovering the power of respect as a professional skill.

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One of the things I love about my job is that I work with a lot of diverse teams; lots of different personalities, skill offerings, relationship dynamics, agendas, and levels of experience. At the start of any project, it takes a little bit of time to flesh out these dynamics to see how the personality hierarchies emerge, and how the relationships within the team develop. After some time, you start to understand the teams, skills sets and dynamics, and work to draw out their strengths for the project.

There was one project that really was an absolute joy to work on (in fact, I may have felt a little heartbroken when we wrapped up). It is hard to articulate why it left such an impact, but I think it's because from the moment we kicked the project off, we all had a similar attitude. That is, in all our interactions, communications, negotiations and delivery of project items, we did so with and appreciation of all project elements. Appreciation of the project, of the organisation, and of our team members.

At the time, it didn't occur to me that this common thread of appreciation was in essence the idea of respect. It is a bit of a cliché to say that we worked so well because of respect. But given that respect is a learnt skill that is individually defined for each person through their personal experiences, it is rare to be a part of a team that holds each component of the project with similar high regard.

Don't get me wrong, it wasn't all roses. There were a lot of stressful and tense moments, sleepless nights, and a pandemic thrown in the middle of it which like most people experienced, made things all that more challenging. But despite each of these obstacles, we all showed up and delivered with what I know realise was respect. We supported each other, we pulled each other in line, we encouraged each other, and we allowed differences of opinions to be acknowledge.

Now in retrospect, it has become apparent, that respect was the glue that held our team together.

To me, maintaining a culture of respect within a team or organisation is incredibly important as it encourages collaboration and communication. In my view, when respect is harboured, it generates trust. Staff then gain more confidence and empowerment because they are treated (and seeing other people treated) with humanity and kindness. From a project point of view, staff become more engaged, and willing to contribute within a positive and collaborative environment. And from an organisation's perspective, staff satisfaction, retention and productivity increases.

In its broadest sense, respect is to hold something in high regard or admiration. There has always been a divide that some people believe respect should be given, and some believe it should be earned. To me I feel respect is neither one nor the other; it is a holistic approach to relationships and interactions. How you interact with each other becomes a reflection of yourself, which means that respect for others actually starts with yourself. As author Dave Willis writes:

“Show respect even to people who don't deserve it, not as a reflection of their character, but as reflection of yours.”

Respect is also acknowledging there are differences in opinions, and that challenges and conflicts will arise. You may find there are people within a team that are constructive, and it's easy to respect their contributions. However, there may be destructive people and situations in a project that will force conflict, and that will challenge all ideals. In these moments, it's even more important to meet these conflicts with respect. Acknowledging the conflict, showing respect for others, entering negotiations with consideration, and interacting with kindness, outcomes may be achieved in a respectful approach.

For the most part, the projects I have been fortunate to work on have had great teams that have worked together in a collaborative and respectful manner. However, not all have been smooth sailing. There was one project where it was clear that respect was lacking in many different aspects. It's hard for me to pinpoint exactly what the underlying concern was as the project proposed significant organisation cultural changes, and many of the people we met were in a defensive mode. As people gradually became more accepting of the project, it was clear there was still a lack of respect for what was trying to be achieved. It wasn't the easiest of projects to be involved in, but I am grateful as it taught me so much about how respect affects people. From a personal perspective, it taught me that by interacting in a respectful manner, you build resilience and self-confidence. From a professional perspective, it taught me how important it is to work at establishing a respectful project space. Without this, personal insecurities can adversely affect interactions, and adverse interactions can affect outcomes. It also showed me firsthand how difficult and fragile situations can be when respect is lacking.

These contrasting projects is why I love working with diverse teams. Each team brings different dynamics, different challenges, and different life lessons. I'm grateful to have worked with amazing teams that have fostered respectful project spaces. I'm equally as gratefully to be exposed to some really challenging teams. These challenges have allowed me to dig deeper into the teams collective psyche, and appreciate how respect can be used as a professional skill to promote productivity, development, and resilience.

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About Alison Fox

Alison has worked across a diverse range of customer centric organisations, with a strong focus on customer engagement, organisational development and design. During her career, she has worked across a variety of creative and corporate organizational development assignments in both public and private sectors, focusing on frontline management, business management and leadership.

Alison's background in design and management has

enabled her to lead teams of researchers, designers and operators to develop new stakeholder engagement processes across government organisations. Providing seamless customer interactions, communication strategies and staff processes, she collaborates with organisations to deliver concise information based on customer and stakeholder requirements.

About Phacelift

Phacelift specialises in providing advice on good business practice. For more information please visit our website: www.phacelift.com.au

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