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HUFF POST BUSINESS

Playing Real Life "Angry Birds": How to Deal With the P.I.G.S in Your Workplace!

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There isn't a person on Earth who hasn't had to deal with a difficult person at work. You know who I'm talking about -- the Director of Office Politics, the gossip or, worse yet, the bagged lunch thief. As somebody who has been addicted to "Angry Birds" since the game first appeared in iTunes, there have been many times when I have fantasized about flinging a red bird right at these officemates, cackling in satisfaction as the walls come tumbling down around them and they *poof* away.

The real world may not afford us the opportunity to deal with difficult coworkers in the same way we get rid of the pigs in "Angry Birds," but there *are* lessons to be learned from the game.

Lesson #1: Understand your P.I.G.S (Personal Insecurities, Guiding Standards)

People say and do controversial things every day, but not everyone's actions or words push your buttons. In fact, two different people could give you the exact same feedback and you may have totally different reactions to each one. Why is that?

Our buttons get pushed when someone brings up something that either hits on a personal insecurity we have or violates our values.

Personal Insecurities

Think about a character trait or a skill that you have that you *know* you do really well. What happens when someone criticizes that skills or trait? In most cases, nothing! When you feel secure about yourself, your buttons are unlikely to get pushed. If somebody told Bill Clinton he was a bad public speaker, it likely wouldn't bother him because he *knows* that's a strength of his.

On the other hand, think about what happens when someone says something about a topic you are inherently sensitive about. Your reaction is usually hurt or anger, right? Your personal insecurity button has been pushed. Remember Marty McFly in *Back to the Future*? His arch rival Biff Tannen always tries to goad him into a fight, and Marty is able to ignore him... until [Biff calls him a chicken](#). That totally pushes a button!

Guiding Standards

We can also get upset when someone says or does something that violates our values or the guiding standards we have for our lives. If you value being on time, for example, how upset does it make you when a coworker is repeatedly late to meetings you have scheduled together? If you value respect, how angry do you get if a team member at work dismisses your opinion or always assumes their solution is best?

Lesson #2: Plan before Acting

When something pushes our buttons, we need to hit pause. Our first reaction to something that makes us upset is a fight or flight response -- an unconscious reaction that makes us snap at the other person in anger or wither away from them in hurt. But, as we know from playing Angry Birds, we do the best at beating those P.I.G.S when we take some time to plan our attack.

Flight, Fight or Right

Instead of Flight or Fight, take a moment to use the conscious part of your brain -- the prefrontal cortex -- and figure out what the right response is. In this way, you aren't reacting, you are *acting*. You have the choice!

Lesson #3: Choose your Strategy Wisely

Whether your buttons are pushed by someone picking on a personal insecurity or someone violating a value, you have four choices.

Change Your Perspective

For a personal insecurity button, the "problem" rarely lies with the person who pushed your button. Usually, it's with you. In many cases, working with a life coach or therapist can help you identify why you are feeling insecure and how to overcome your insecurity.

In the case of a values violation, try to imagine the other person's perspective. For example, you may have a strong value for sticking to an agreed upon project plan at work. Your coworker, on the other hand, may have a strong value for flexibility and freedom. Understanding that the other person isn't intentionally trying to upset you may do a lot to diffuse the situation.

Accept It

This is a perfectly valid choice. Sometimes, after you identify why something is pushing your buttons, you may not be ready to address the underlying insecurity. For example, you may not be ready to talk to someone who has violated your values, and instead are willing to simply let the incident go.

Change the Relationship

For a personal insecurity, this may include talking to your coworker about how you are sensitive about a topic. For example, you could say, "It seems like you joke a lot about my weight. That makes me uncomfortable and I'd appreciate it if you didn't make those kinds of jokes around me anymore."

For a values violation, the discussion could be about creating boundaries. For the coworkers who are always late to meetings, you may choose to have them meet you in your office so you can continue doing work while you wait for them. For a coworker who is a bad tipper, you may choose not to go to lunch with them and instead enjoy other activities where their tipping habits don't matter.

Leave the Relationship

This is by far the most difficult of the four choices. But for some friends and even some intimate relationships, it's the best option. When someone is constantly violating your values and you are getting less and less enjoyment from the relationship, it may be time to part ways.