

THUMB RULES¹

Count de Buffon, 18th century naturalist, once said that the cat, "appears to have feelings only for himself, loves only conditionally, and only enters into relations (with people) in order to abuse them." A wag has suggested that most supervisors behave similarly. Now, although that may be a smidge overstated, there are times when people working together get into habits of abusing themselves and each other. In order to short-circuit that kind of behavior, there are some rules of thumb which might be helpful to remember in our relations with one another.

1. Each of us has control of our own lives.

Who we are is who we want to be. What we do is what we truly mean. Being reactive instead of active keeps our minds in neutral rather than drive. We acquiesce by our silence to what others do if we don't speak up for our ideas and our feelings. Silence is indeed assent.

2. To find answers and get information, ask questions.

If we ask not, we will never find out why. If we don't know why something is happening, it is better to ask than to sit around grumbling about "nobody ever tells me anything." By saying that, we indicate our disinterest in searching for ourselves.

3. Clear up gripes as soon as possible.

If we have a gripe or complaint about what is being done or the way things are going, we should share our feelings with whoever is in charge of that area to see if a change can be made to eliminate the irritation. If not, and we still feel irritated, we should examine what in us is causing it, possibly changing our attitude. A continuing gripe signals our unwillingness to take a positive self action.

4. Monday morning quarterbacking is unhealthy for the soul.

It's very easy to point out the errors of other's ways and what could or should have been done after it's all over and the decision(s) made. If we don't care for the result, we should keep it to ourselves unless continuing evaluation and development are called for and allow for future change.

5. Reliving the past is toxic.

The past is over and we can't do anything more about it. So forget it.

6. Say what you mean and really listen to others.

We must learn to transmit our thoughts clearly and to listen to our colleagues so as to grasp the real meaning of what they're telling us. We must listen to nuances and be aware of hidden meanings in our own messages. We have words to express and explain our feelings; vague allusions or joking phrases are inappropriate. Words are hard to find sometimes, yet they are our best vehicles for communicating ideas and sharing feelings. It is unfair of us to expect others to be able to "read our minds" or our body language when we won't say what we mean or try to say what we think we mean. The very act of talking can often clarify our meanings. What we say may be repeated and we may be quoted. Is what we say what we want others to hear?

7. There is no mysterious "they."

We are all in this together. We are they.

8. Don't be disturbed.

Nobody or nothing can upset us or cause us stress. It is only what we feel about people and events that may bring disturbance to our heads. If we look for and expect the best, we will find it - almost all the time. We are what we think.

9. Be of good cheer.

A giggle a day keeps the "gloomies" away. A glad heart makes a cheerful countenance; a cheerful heart is a good medicine; a downcast spirit dries up the bones. We are as happy or unhappy, content or miserable as we suppose ourselves to be.

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