

[Don't react, learn to respond]

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If a situation arises that irritates us, we immediately react, almost Always in anger. Not good. For a better outcome, try responding instead

WORK WISE - A fortnightly column by Rahul Kapoor

I read something very interesting in a book recently, it made a huge impact on me and I am certain that you will have some lessons to learn as well. Here goes:

Let us consider this example. It's a rainy night. You decide to go to a shopping center to pick up some medicines. You look for a parking place close to the store. The lot is full. But there are two parking places directly in front of the store occupied by just one vehicle. The driver has left the car at an angle with part of it in both places. The parking stalls are clearly marked. There is no reason why the car could not be parked in a way so that another driver could use the valuable parking space. What will be your feeling when you see some thing like this?

Perhaps, you get angry and feel frustrated. Lets assume that you finally get parking place. You get to the drug store and see the driver of the car. You give him a piece of your mind. But the driver just does not respond and runs out. You get even more upset and infuriated with his behaviour and in an offending manner you abuse him.

Once you are in the drug store you get to know that there has just been a bad accident near by and the driver of the car who had parked carelessly, had driven to make telephone calls to the police and the ambulance. He had also picked up some first aid for those who were injured. How would you feel now?

In the first situation you reacted without thinking and therefore I am certain you would not feel very good about your behaviour. You would feel sorry for having lost your cool and for having been unreasonable. But the damage is done and you cannot do much about it.

I summarize this situation using an equation $Situation + Reaction = Disaster$. The key word here is reaction. Often in life we react, whether it's at home with our siblings or on the road with fellow drivers or at work place with colleagues. And every time we react, we create a disaster of sorts for others and ourselves. Reaction results in tension and creates bitterness in people and therefore relationships suffer.

There is yet another simple but effective formula for success. I define it as $Situation + Response = Outcome$. It suggests that when you find yourself in an awkward situation first ask your self what would you like to have as an outcome of your action and then respond. This will ensure that you will think rationally before you act.

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For example, consider the previous example of the driver. If as an outcome, you wanted to communicate to the driver that he was causing inconvenience for others, then perhaps that's the message that you needed to focus on setting aside all the anger and frustration. This will allow you to respond and get your message across effectively without hurting anybody's feelings.

Yes, it is easier said than done because people normally react in most situations. Thus it's almost like going against a habit that you have mastered for so many years. Stephen Covey says that 'each of us tend to think we see things as they are, that we are objective. But this is not the case, we see the world not as it is, but as we are-or as we are conditioned to see it'. Therefore, we rarely see things from others' points of view. This causes misunderstandings, difference of opinions and we tend to lose our temper and often react. The net result is disaster.

However, if you are keen to change this habit and want to get into the habit of responding then the first step you need to take is to list all common situations in which you react. Like when you are running late and the traffic is slow moving, chances are you will get irritated with all drivers ahead of you. When you are running against time on a project and some one in your team makes a silly mistake. Waiting that extra minute in the hotel for your order to be served. All these situations will tempt you to react.

Now, ask your self a question What would you like to have as an outcome for all these situations? Perhaps make a quick call to the people you are supposed to meet and inform them that you are running late. Speak to the team member who made a mistake and find out why the mistake occurred, perhaps also give him a chance to make amends. Request the waiter to speed up things for you.

Go ahead and now decide whether you want to react or respond. Not surprisingly, you will get things done faster, better and yet maintain your composure if you respond. You will definitely like your behaviour, you will always be in control of the situation, you will not insult or hurt people and thus get the best both out of people and yourself.

Let me warn you that it will not be easy for you to adapt to this new behavior and you will go wrong and still react. But catch yourself reacting and respond immediately. This will allow you to do some damage control. It will be like learning to drive a car, you will make mistakes initially but with practice you will get better. We are what we repeatedly do. Excellence, then, is not an act, but a habit. So, go ahead and respond.