

Does it pay to be judgemental?

The negative inference of the word *judgemental* seems to have widened in our corporate culture. If *judgemental* means unwarranted condemnation of others I have no problem. Because I consider myself tolerant guy, I am surprised when some of my decisions are considered judgemental. As a believer in fairness, balance and not wanting to look down on others, I have given the matter considerable thought.

Try as I may, I cannot avoid the basic presumption that making a judgement call is a natural and necessary human function. People make choices, and they either like something or they don't!

I always look to nature for answers when I am perplexed—a dog or other animal almost always avoids what it believes to be tainted food. This is good judgment—I will reject this food as bad for me. Surely this is what people do?

Yet in the corporate world, it seems we are not allowed to reject, at least openly, what we do not like. In the so-called spirit of collaboration, much appears to be accepted just because it would not be good to be seen to reject someone, an idea or the choices made by others.

No one has a problem when positive judgements are made, yet when fault is

found this is perceived as negative. This seems a touch hypocritical—surely we are obliged to assess people and situations in the context of our own requirement. Our search for the right fit with others in business automatically dictates a positive or negative judgement. Are we supposed to keep all negative judgements to ourselves?

The concealment of how we really feel has become a sought after skill. Think of the countless euphemisms we hear and use everyday. "I'll take a rain check" means "get lost...you are not my kind of person", while "you are over qualified" means "I'd rather jump over the moon than hire you".

Has our fear of being considered judgemental resulted in an aversion to facing unpleasant truths? What would be the business cost if we only made positive judgements? Perhaps this is why our society is so litigious—do we rely on legislation, rules and process to make negative choices for us?

It is assumed that everyone is talented, intelligent and loaded with potential and should be invited into any role whatever the actual level of suitability. Then, when non-performance, compliance or outright failure occurs, we look to set process, lawyers and courts to remedy what should not have happened!

I often find it is the more intuitive, risk-taking and direct people who are labelled as judgemental. Similarly people with strongly articulated opinions are considered arrogant and overbearing, when in fact they are merely voicing rationales



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for sound decision making. There is a difference between being tactless and being judgemental. This distinction has somehow been lost. Any disagreement is apt to be seen through a lens of uncooperativeness, intolerance, or hostility.

Political correctness protects the feelings of others. This is a good thing and should not be confused with making good business choices. This is where the true danger lies.

It is dangerous, and a waste of talent, to confuse opinion, or judgement, with the kind of blowhard tactics of those who find fault in everything and condemn not only the issue but the person. For example, if a certain position calls for ongoing accuracy and precision, it cannot be given to a maladroit, unfocused and unskilled person. Similarly if a high benchmark is sought, whatever does not meet the required standard should be rejected. These judgement calls, more often than not, unfairly provoke the reaction: "You don't know me...You have no right to say I am not suited for this" or worse "Who are you to say I am not qualified/suited for this?" I cannot help but think of the fascination so many have with Simon Cowell. Does he voice the sort of thing we would love to be able to say ourselves?

We all, openly or clandestinely, make positive and negative judgments. Good business decisions depend on this innate human ability. Pretending we are not judgemental will lead to costly time-wasting, inefficiency and hopeless clutter.

Perhaps the simplest guideline is to clear up the difference in our own minds between evaluation/judgment and gratuitous bigotry/condemnation!

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