



## THE BRIGHT SIDE® OF CHANGE

Written by Donna Rae Smith

### THE BLAME GAME

It's a natural response to conflict: something has gone wrong. Someone else is to blame. Rather than ask ourselves how we can constructively address the situation, we play the victim or the aggressor. The fault lies somewhere else, and we're powerless to change it. Or so we tell ourselves.

**THE CHALLENGE:** Paul was suddenly thrust into a senior management position, leading a newly created business group responsible for innovation across the entire company. With this promotion came a new staff, a new business group and a lot of high-profile attention. It was a high-profile opportunity, one that required ramping up Paul's leadership skills to a much more strategic level.



Paul recognized that there were many conflicts at work that weren't being addressed productively. The climate was rife with negative conversations. Paul blamed his colleagues for this behavior, and yet took part in it himself, falling into a tit-for-tat pattern. The thinking basically was 'if that guy's going to act like a jerk, then I will too.' With Bright Side's help, Paul came to the awareness that he was supporting these negative behaviors. He acknowledged that if he was to become a more effective and influential leader, he would need to stop blaming others and address his own behaviors first.

**THE SOLUTION:** As a leader, Paul's role is to ensure that his team stays on course, keeps its eye on the goal, and doesn't get derailed. He can't do that if he doesn't rise above the fray. Paul moved from focusing on his colleagues' shortcomings to asking himself how he could be more effective. We helped him turn his and his team's attention on desired outcomes, rather than on each other.

Toward that end, Paul began ignoring destructive behavior from his colleagues. He started concentrating instead on his own responses. When a new colleague came on board who was prone to temper tantrums, he refused to "go down to their level", as he put it. Instead he stayed rational and fact-based, not letting his

emotions get pulled into the maelstrom. He focused conversations strictly on what needed to be accomplished. He purposefully modeled the behaviors he desired for himself and others.

Paul has intentionally created new ways of thinking about his work. Now, when he encounters a problem, his initial reaction is “what can I do to change *my* behaviors?”, “what can I do to be more effective?” and “how can I lead by example, demonstrating the constructive behaviors that I expect from my group?”

## **THE EXPERIMENT**

You’ve heard it a million times, but it bears repeating: You can’t change how others behave. You can only control what you do. Once you really understand this and take responsibility for your own responses, you will see powerful change. Once others see that their negative behaviors aren’t achieving the desired outcomes, they can choose to follow your model.

1. When faced with destructive or counter-productive communication and behaviors, don’t feed the flames. Ask yourself what you can do to be more effective. What is one tangible, observable, concrete behavior I can exhibit that will change this situation?
2. Keep your sights fixed firmly on the goal.
3. Engage colleagues in constructive conversations that contribute to achieving the goal.
4. Give yourself credit. Recognize that when you exhibit positive behaviors, you have a beneficial impact on business. Acknowledge that you’re demonstrating these behaviors despite the potential discomfort, and commend yourself for establishing new patterns of behavior.
5. Identify when colleagues exhibit positive behaviors. Try to do this at least five times a day. This does a few things:
  - a. lets team members know that you value positive, constructive behavior;
  - b. keeps you on your toes; and exposes you to learning (and adopting) the effective behaviors from those around you that diminish the blame game.

**THE CONVERSATION:** Share the results of your experiment in the comments below or contact the author directly at [donnarae@bright-side.com](mailto:donnarae@bright-side.com).

**ABOUT DONNA RAE SMITH**

Donna Rae Smith is a guest blogger for Smart Business. She has forged a career, enterprise and an applied discipline on the practice of teaching leaders to be masters of change. She is the Founder and CEO of Bright Side, Inc., a transformational change catalyst company with an emphasis on the behavior-side of change. For more than two decades, Donna Rae Smith and the Bright Side team have been recognized as innovators in executing behavioral strategies coalesced with business strategies to accelerate and sustain business results. Bright Side®, The Behavioral Strategy Company, has partnered with over 250 of the world's most influential companies. For more information, please visit [www.bright-side.com](http://www.bright-side.com) or contact Donna Rae at [donnarae@bright-side.com](mailto:donnarae@bright-side.com).

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