

Adult syndrome: Is there a cure?

By Dan
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After three decades of work I've observed a serious disease that affects the workplace. I have termed this condition adult syndrome, because it affects almost every person who reaches adulthood. Surprisingly, very few of those infected know they have it.



Similar to other diseases, adult syndrome has several types, but each type creates similar end results - lowered levels of productivity.

After reviewing the symptoms listed here, you may find that you are infected with more than one type. If this is the case, you may need to spend extra time working on the cure.

Type 1 adult syndrome: imagined understanding.

This form of the disease is carried by

those who imagine that because they are adults, they should already understand what someone is saying before they say it. The condition is usually observed by others through the frequent repeating of the phrase 'I know.' It is sometimes referred to as arrogance.

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Interestingly, this form of the disease affects people trying to hide the fact that they don't know

something - mainly because they're afraid they'll look like idiots for not being omniscient.

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Example A: A budding manager is sitting in a class learning how to calculate financial returns for a capital investment. Although he doesn't fully understand the process, he acts like he does (he doesn't want to look like an idiot) and doesn't say a word when the instructor asks 'any questions?'

Example B: An employee has a concern, but before she can get the whole issue on the table, the manager is answering.

Never mind that the manager's answer is unrelated to the employee's question, his intimidating voice, tone and attitude of superiority causes the employee to back away from restating the question.

She realises she will make the manager look like an idiot if she points out he was way off the mark and she don't want to suffer the consequences of embarrassing him.

Type II adult syndrome: intentional deflection

This type of the disease is all about self-preservation. It fools the observer by redirecting attention when the infected person doesn't know the answer, or doesn't want to know.

Example A: When asked to evaluate what went wrong with a certain project, a project manager finds someone down the line to blame. Although a more effective approach would be an intellectually honest evaluation, that won't happen as the infected person is too concerned that others might see a flaw in his initial approach, which will make him look inept to his peers.

Example B: In a training class, a supervisor makes an error that results in an assignment not being completed correctly. When the instructor begins to discuss alternatives so that the supervisor learns from his mistakes, the supervisor keeps interrupting with "yeah, but..." and highlights any



aspect of the project that went okay.

Essentially, the infected supervisor feels he must validate the fact that he has what it takes to be a supervisor, and misses out on a key learning opportunity.

Example C: A worker with a problem comes to a manager, but the manager has no clue about how to solve it. Not wanting the subordinate to know this, the manager interrupts the worker, saying that if he can't solve this simple problem, he can be replaced by someone who can.

Curing adult syndrome is possible, but the treatment can be a tough pill to swallow. The best antidote is a large, thick slice of humble pie. Don't

misunderstand, this is far from grovelling. It's just a dose of reality. Sadly, many deny humility's healing powers, viewing it as a weakness rather than a strength.

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Those who hold such views would benefit from listening to successful business consultant and marketing expert Ira Williams, who says "to be humble is not to be weak - to be



humble is to be strong." These are fresh words with a powerful age old meaning. Sadly, they are ignored by most in today's business climate.

Additional treatment includes increasing patience as well as one's ability to genuinely consider another person's words. In his book *Why Don't You Want What I Want? How to Win Support for Your Ideas without Hard Sell, Manipulation, or Power Plays*, author Rick Maurer says we need to be willing to be changed by listening to another person. This doesn't mean we desire to be changed, but rather that we are willing.

It's a fine line of difference, but an important one. Misunderstanding this difference is why many continue to suffer from adult syndrome.

Bottom line, if we are willing to listen to someone else in a mindset that acknowledges we aren't omniscient and we don't have all the answers, the symptoms of adult syndrome begin to fade away. Then reality comes to the surface, and working relationships become healthy.

Help eliminate adult syndrome in your workplace. Listen to others with a willingness to learn, and if necessary, be changed. As Ira Williams says, it's not a sign of weakness, but a position of strength.



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