ATTITUDE

Attitude is a mental position relative to a way of thinking, behaving or leaning toward that which you believe. It is the way a person thinks about somebody or something and the way she behaves toward someone. It is her personal view or opinion of something. It also describes her general emotional approach to any person or situation.

From a personal development standpoint, attitude is broader than this popular usage. A positive attitude implies a way of thinking that is predominantly positive and optimistic. The opposite inclination, a negative attitude is predominantly pessimistic.

Components of Attitude

Attitude has three components, namely:

1. Emotional

   The emotional component represents a person’s feelings towards an object. In other words, it is the disposition towards something. For example, a sales representative behaves in a positive manner with his clients. He feels that the client can do good to him by making a purchase, therefore he has a positive emotional component.

2. Informational

   The informational component consists of the information, idea or beliefs that a person has about the object. For example, if someone feels that his partner can not play cricket very well, he would not let him take charge if needed. Therefore, the belief plays the role of determining the informational component.

3. Behavioural

   The behavioural component represents how a person actually behaves. It consists of cognitive and affective (values & beliefs) parts. Our beliefs and values are combined with our cognitive component; thus, two components (affective and cognitive) give us our long range or persistent measurements for dealing with the world.

   While a person may have the competency to perform a task, that does not mean he or she will have the desire (attitude) to do so correctly. In other words, competencies give us the ability to perform, while attitudes give us the desire to perform. Attitudes change with various events in a person's life. These emotional changes also vary in length of time.

Positive and Negative Affectivity

Positive Affectivity (PA)

It may be defined as a sense of well being, pleasantly involved in life and having positive attitudes. Positive attitude, positive thinking, and optimism are now known to be a root cause of many positive life benefits—the good life and well being. You'll live longer and be healthier and happier with a positive attitude toward life. In addition, you're more likely to be successful if you learn to use the power of thinking positive, adopting positive attitudes, and affirmations to gain important life benefits.
A positive attitude and optimistic thinking early in life predict health and well being in later years. Analysis of 99 Harvard graduates found a strong correlation between their optimistic thinking as college students and good health at age 40 and above.

In his ground-breaking book, A Primer in Positive Psychology, Christopher Petersen, PhD, says, "...optimism has demonstrable benefits, and pessimism has drawbacks." He goes on to say, "...optimism...has been linked to positive mood and good morale; to perseverance and effective problem solving; to academic, athletic, military, occupational, and political success; to popularity; to good health; and even to long life and freedom from trauma."

Even if a person has been a pessimistic, negative thinker for many years, it is never too late to change the way of thinking and reap the benefits of a positive attitude. Optimists believe they are accountable for good things and that good things will generally come their way. If something bad comes instead, optimists tend to write it off as an isolated incident, an anomaly, or something out of their control; optimists believe things will be better in the future.

Negative Affectivity (NA)

It is the state of being nervous, tense, worried, distressed and pessimistic. Negative affectivity (NA) has been defined as reflecting individual differences in negative emotion and self concept (Watson & Clark, 1984). It has been argued that NA may affect perceived levels of stress by influencing perceptions of the self or environment. Accordingly, individuals found to be high in NA tend to report higher levels of dissatisfaction and perceived stress, when compared with individuals who have lower levels of NA. Although there is strong empirical evidence linking NA to psychological well-being outcomes some authors have suggested that this relationship originates out of a tendency of those individuals high in NA to respond to self report methodologies with an overall negative perception.

Moyle (1995), in a comprehensive analysis of the effects of NA on a number of outcome measures, found that negative affectivity did not universally affect all outcomes in a similar manner. Instead she found that NA functioned in a number of different ways to influence outcomes. Moyle noted that NA was not simply a generic nuisance variable but rather it played a complex and substantive role within the stress process.

Functions of Attitude

Adjustment Function

Attitudes help employees in organizations to adjust to the organizational environment. For example, if an employee finds his job satisfying and develops a positive attitude towards it, he or she is more likely to adjust with the organizational environment as compared to the one who has developed a negative attitude towards the job or the organization.

Ego Defence Function

Attitude defines and defends self image. A person may make a poor decision and stick to it despite warnings and in the process, develop a negative attitude towards the one who had warned him, considering him inexperienced and irreverent. Hence, later this attitude would protect the ego of the person when he shall refuse to listen to the warnings.

Value Expressive Function

Attitudes towards certain things help in expressing the values possessed. A person, who has a strong negative attitude towards a liar, has his values of not telling a lie represented by this attitude.
Knowledge function

Attitude helps to understand and explain the world. A person may have negative attitude towards a group and therefore consider everything said or done by that group to be wrong or threatening. He has developed a frame of reference to assay the group which is a function of his attitude.

Changing Attitudes

Changing attitudes in organizations and in general is a difficult task; however, modification of existing attitudes is much easier.

The first step in trying to change or modify attitudes is to identify the barriers in it and demolish them. The common barriers are as follows:

Prior Commitment

Prior commitment of people prevents attitudinal change in them. It is actually disposition towards certain beliefs. For example, a graduate from a foreign university would often be considered suitable for a number of jobs irrespective of his interest and aptitude, based on the belief that he or she is a foreign qualified person. This belief may be harmful for the organization. It is actually a prior commitment of the hiring people.

Insufficient Information

Another barrier to bringing about attitudinal change is insufficiency of information. People do not find sufficient reasons for changing their attitude which may become a hindrance in changing attitudes.

How to Change Attitudes

Find prior commitment, break it

Probably most overlooked is this strategy. Most often we forget that one of the reasons people don’t change their attitude is that they have made a conscious or subconscious prior commitment. Uncovering those hidden agendas usually results in an opportunity to change one’s attitude about previous commitments. Even stability can be a prior commitment and until I understand that this new change, method or system is going to produce stability--I am not willing to let go of what is stable.

Provide new/different information

Often, people don't see or feel the need to change. Providing information to support change or the need to change can often open previously closed doors. Communicating change initiatives prior to implementation is often scary but almost always better than not doing it until the implementation begins.

Use fear/ punishment

Fear can be positive if we take the time to frame it correctly. Fear of some sort, often creates the urgency needed for change to take place and for change gaps to be bridged, but the key to using fear is to show how the present path is not the best one. You don't just threaten people by stating if they don't do it they will suffer the consequences. You use a combination of tactics to show with information how the present direction will lead to lower levels of benefits and more sacrifice than changing directions--personally or organizationally.
Influence friends/family

One of the major reasons--in my view--for using 360 degree assessment is so that someone can get hit over the head by people whose opinions often matter--saving leadership from doing it. While this may be the crass side of 360, it does work because of the influence of friends and peers. 360s certainly have weaknesses and used solely for the purpose of changing attitudes is probably more harmful than helpful in the "long term." However, a structured ongoing program of development that includes regular 360 assessments and training can be effective in changing attitudes.

Psychotherapy

Psychotherapy is actually the treatment of mental and emotional disorders using psychological methods. Psychotherapy, thus, does not include physiological interventions, such as drug therapy or electroconvulsive therapy, although it may be used in combination with such methods. Behavior therapy aims to help the patient eliminate undesirable habits or irrational fears through conditioning. Humanistic therapy tends to be more optimistic, basing its treatment on the theory that individuals have a natural inclination to strive toward self-fulfillment. Therapists such as Carl Rogers and Abraham Maslow used a highly interactive client-therapist relationship, compelling clients to realize exactly what they are saying or how they are behaving, in order to foster a sense of self-awareness. Cognitive therapies try to show the client that certain, usually negative, thoughts are irrational, with the goal of restructuring such thoughts into positive, constructive ideas. Such methods include Albert Ellis's rational-emotive therapy, where the therapist argues with the client about his negative ideas.

Psychotherapy may be brief, lasting just a few sessions, or it may extend over many years. More than one client may be involved, as in marriage or family counselling, or a number of individuals, as in group psychotherapy.

Cooperate, involve in decision making

Giving people--whose attitude is deviant from the norm--leadership opportunity can often lead to positive change for the person and the organization. Some say resistance is energy and this resistant energy occurs often in the form of challenging attitudes and opposition--disagreeableness. Yet, often this energy can be harnessed to propel the organization forward while leading to attitudinal change in the opposition.

Seek first to understand

An age old maxim made popular by Stephen Covey's 7 habits, empathy like compassion forces us to take the view of the opposing force and to attempt to understand the reasons for the resistance. Much has been written about this "soft" skill but by far, the caring sense that someone expresses authentically towards another person removes barriers to changes in attitudes. Empathy creates openings for new information and influence to reach through previously locked doors.

Resolve cognitive dissonance.

Most often, each of us has a dialectic taking place inside ourselves about our attitudes and about the results of our behaviors. To resolve this dissonance or conflict can often lead to positive changes in attitudes for us personally as well as in organizations. People are certain that their behavior always works, yet must often protect that faulty behavior with an attitude. Helping them to understand the conflict between their attitude and the behavior can lead to positive change.
REFERENCES


FURTHER READING

- What is an Attitude? http://www.lessons4living.com/what_is_an_attitude.htm