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5 tips to people your way through problems

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People are hard. That's it, I've said it. People, myself included, are confusing, and frustrating, and inconsistent. But, (unpopular opinion here) that's what we need to create meaningful relationships, which ultimately leads to meaningful work. Unfortunately for our deadlines and deliverables, "people problems" take time to overcome. So, do yourself a favor, save time in the long run, and read this before entering that meeting you're dreading.

1. Remember people are people.

That's really the only way to say it. Any of those "less than perfect" traits that you have, that Zoom box probably has too. Cut people some slack, give them grace, let it go. Whichever mantra you prefer, do that. Keep in mind that the people you're presenting to, even the ones with their cameras off, may be having a rough day. Whether it's the worst hair-day of their lives or looking like death after staying up with a sick kid all night, that person is a real person with real stuff going on.

2. Stop pinging and start listening.

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I know it's hard. Sometimes you need to be heard, but that sometime isn't right now. Instead of pinging your work bestie when the meeting starts going south, start listening. Take notes on what you're hearing, make the commitment to listen instead of respond. Do your colleagues and clients the favor of listening. Even better: Repeat back what they said and allow them to clarify, but wait until they're done talking.

3. Allow for mental transitions.

Think back to High School and all the things that got accomplished between classes. You went to the bathroom, you caught up on the latest gossip, and got tipped off about the pop-quiz in Math. When we worked in the office, we also had this. We went to the bathroom, we got caught up on the most recent email thread, and we got client insights before the meeting started. But in our remote work world, we just don't have that luxury now. Now, we're in the same chairs, in the same room, at the same desk, and the people come to us. We no longer have the mental transition time that we once didn't even know we needed. Be the person to give everyone "time back." Better yet, be the person who schedules meetings from 10:30-10:55, so people can transition to the next thing.

4. Enjoy your team.

The beautiful thing about working with a team is there are very few "deal breaker" decisions you make on your own. You may be the messenger, or the catalyst, but these high stakes decisions are rarely done in a vacuum. You have a team. You spend a lot of time with these folks and (whether you realize it or not) they've seen you at your best and your worst. You can choose how you work with the people around you. Your team is there for you (by their mere construct of being part of the team.) Be open and willing to carry the load for someone if they need it, and by the same token, be willing to let them carry yours.

5. Try it.

This one is hard, but hard things are good for us, and good for the type work we do. There are a million different ways to say this: "Fail Fast," "Iterate Often," "Crawl. Walk. Run." But if we break it down, they all mean the same thing. Just try it. If there's a suggestion on the table, try it. (This doesn't mean, store it in your back pocket to say I told-ya-so later.) Use this as an opportunity to build your relationship with the other people at the table. Work through the suggestions together. Let everyone have input. Not only does it open you up to learning something new, but it also allows someone else to be heard and valued. Try it.

TLDR; The road to meaningful work is a journey of "people problems." Instead of overcoming "people problems" as a means to an end, take a step back, and do what you can to help your team see that the "people problems" are really the solutions you're desperate to find.

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