

How to Deal With Someone Who's Sincere, but Sincerely Wrong

One of the greatest challenges you'll ever face in the workplace is confronting someone who is sincere, but *sincerely wrong*. Their absolute belief in the rightness of what they're doing is what makes it so difficult to change their mind or offer correction. I especially see it when I work with religious organizations and encounter a staff member who's making a huge mistake. Everyone else can see it, but because they invest it with personal belief—*sometimes even spiritual justification*—it's almost impossible to correct. In fact, I've dealt with a few who are so convinced of their position, they'd allow the organization to go bankrupt before they admitted how wrong they were.

First of all, never allow yourself to become this person. A lot of my readers are Christian, and I can tell you that the Bible never tells us to blindly follow anything. As Yoram Hazony writes in *The Wall Street Journal*: "Abraham is famous for challenging God over the fate of Sodom: 'Will not the judge of all the earth do justice?' Moses repeatedly argues against God's intention to destroy Israel. David is outraged over what he sees as God's unjust killing of one of his men, and similar arguments with God appear in Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Habakkuk, Jonah and Job." So don't ever use your faith as a reason to ignore the truth.

But what if you run up against someone who's sincerely and passionately wrong? Here's a few suggestions:

1) Be Gracious. Very often you'll find that in their zealotry and passion, they can be rude and disrespectful. You see this a great deal in political debates. Instead of arguing the

issues, they take personal swipes at the opponent. But you take the high road—it will always pay off later.

2) Keep to the facts. No matter what they say, don't let personal emotions, frustration or anger color the discussion. Do your homework, and win the day based on reality. Get the statistics, citations, research or whatever to prove your point and keep bringing the discussion back to the facts. A powerful tool for this is simply asking questions. Jesus was brilliant at exposing hypocrisy by asking the right questions.

3) You have to read between the lines. Be ready for some pretty crazy statements. I once pointed out why a client's strategy was failing, but an employee countered everything I threw at him with trite lines like: "We've done it before." "We're too small for that to work." "We're too professional to try something like that." "I've never seen that work before." Completely unfounded stuff. But don't react too quickly. Analyze what he is saying, try to read between the lines. In many cases, his insecurity is keeping him from seeing the truth.

4) Help them save face. Remember that fear of failure is a powerful drug. For them, being proved wrong also means admitting failure. It takes a secure person to own up to that. So be nice. That's why being gracious is so important. They're much more likely to admit the truth if you can help them save face.

Human relationships are sometimes messy and don't always make sense. An issue may seem black and white to you, but others have a great deal riding on their side of the story. **Be gracious, be clear, be factual, and most important, give them a way out.**

Have you encountered someone who's sincere, but sincerely wrong? How did you deal with it?