

The Relationship Contract

Hello, my name is Kieran Hearty and this is a short one-page summary of one of the key ingredients of my work as an Executive Coach, and also as a developer of leaders and high performing teams. It is called “relationship contracting”.

Premise: Many relationships at work break down irretrievably or, are never formed in the first place. Eventually, it becomes increasingly difficult, and may even feel impossible, to communicate effectively, or even work effectively with the other person. If the relationship has deteriorated to the point where you actively dislike each other, and worse, if one of you is senior to the other, this can become truly damaging, with the potential to impact your effectiveness, and even your career. In some cases, it can lead to acute stress.

What if I was to tell you that most of the time, **this is avoidable**, even with difficult people?

Caveat: There has a great deal of media scrutiny on ‘bullying’ or intimidating leadership behaviour, especially in recent NHS scandals. There are many leaders, not just in the NHS, who quite literally ‘get away with murder’ in terms of their unacceptable behaviour towards people less senior to them. What I am sharing with you can help alleviate some of the problem, but sometimes, all the contracting in the world will never work, and courage is required. Please remember – in the face of bullying or unacceptable behaviour, there are many people on your side, including the law. Most people give in to bullying (or avoid it) because they are fearful of the consequences. If you have the courage to face up to the instigator, tell them that their behaviour is unacceptable, and if they do not stop, you will take the appropriate action, including legal action if required, most of the time it will stop..

The contract: Few employees at work invest the time in sitting down with their fellow workers, or their boss, (either individually, or as a team) to discuss how best they can work together. The people who do invest this time are richly rewarded with productive working relationships, and few personal issues.

Managers and leaders in organisations always seem to be ‘too busy’ to invest a paltry amount of time in planning, and then managing their own development. They seem to think that it is the job of HR, or their boss, or somebody else, to develop them, and even then they may think that selecting a few days of training every year from a menu will have some kind of miraculous effect, where, through some kind of osmosis, they acquire skills and become better at what they do.

Opportunity: I was inspired in 2006 when I heard one particular finding from a piece of research by Global Novations. It said that employees who were having “**regular, meaningful, career development discussions**” with their manager were out-performing others (who were not) by an average of 25%. Now that’s what I call a serious return on investment!

Other types of contracting:

The Coaching Contract: A recognised key principle of the Coaching profession is: “No contract – No Coaching”. In other words, unless we agree what the focus and objectives of our work is, with clearly defined ‘outcomes’ that define what success will look like as a result of our work, there is no context or purpose, and therefore no productive coaching that can occur.

The Development Contract: The same applies to your future (career) development, and by this I mean your future progress from new hire, to high-performing contributor, to manager, to a future leader in the organisation. It is the job of each employee to take full responsibility for owning their development, and managing the process, over time, in partnership with their manager. They ‘own it’ - their manager ‘supports it’. The organisation, in partnership with HR, provides the necessary resources, both internally and externally.

The development contract is therefore not just about your current job, so, as part of your one to one discussions with your boss, it is critical that you schedule a specific development agenda, that helps you to first share your future aspirations within the company, and agree on a development path that will help you to develop, or improve the skills, knowledge, experience and behaviours that are required in order to be successful.

Part of the contract is agreeing what “regular” and “meaningful” (development conversations) actually mean to you, the rest of the contract is all about the “what” the “why” and the “how” in your development. The contracting process is initiated by you, the employee, and agreed, amended and supported by your boss. Development is not training! It is a combination of training, coaching, on the job learning, and a lot more besides, including mentoring, work assignments, projects, etc.

The flip-side of the contract of course is that in order to secure the support of your boss, you need to use your new skills, knowledge and experience to deliver on your contracted performance expectations! This is how your company achieves ROI from your development.

www.igiveu.co.uk