The Practice of Creative Indifference

By Charlie Smith

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The point is to be Committed and Operate with Creative Indifference.

A distraught senior executive came to me the other day and whispered that he had begun to think that the company was a mental hospital. He always had believed that mental hospitals were for people who acted crazy, may indeed be crazy, may be a danger to themselves and society, or who are too weird for other people to want them around.

He said he was grateful for his insight and the freedom and opportunity it had offered. He said that he had shared it with employees who then felt they had been given a new lease on life. All of a sudden, they realized why they felt so stressed and why, no matter how hard they worked, never felt a lot better.

He said that everyone was paid well and kept thinking that if they did the right thing and stayed the course, they would be cared for, make a lot of money, have a great future, and someday would obtain peace and joy. It never seemed to happen.

He said that the mental hospital was a well-kept secret. No one admits they are nuts. They minimize their suffering, or say it’s only for a little while, short-term, because business is tough, the current boss is severe, or there’s something wrong with the strategy.

I felt sad for him and thought that the causes of the craziness are the untouchable boundaries set by people in power based on their view of what they and the company need to survive.

People make boundaries all the time. When these come from a boss or an unspoken culture, most people keep their mouths shut or dilute the intensity of their speaking. Creativity is not unleashed and collective intelligence often gives way to collective stupidity. The beauty of "creative indifference" is that it takes you to a zero point in a conversation where you can see every dimension of the continuum between possible points of view. It allows for the freedom of choice, movement and thought that ultimately brings the best out of yourself and other people.

Herb Stevenson in Paradox: A Gestalt Theory of Change discusses the benefits of Creative Indifference.
He says, "...Chaos theory, complex adaptive systems and complex adaptive, non-linear systems theory and complexity science theory, acknowledge that seeking order to the exception of chaos can lead to the destruction or mediocre functioning of the system."

This is the same as any of us forcing our point of view on others, even it about the importance of sales, profit and growth.

Stevenson continues, "When we can return to an acceptance of chaos and order in a situation, and holding both equally without bias, creative energy emerges and unseen possibilities are emerge that always were there."

In the simplest terms, Fritz Perls the Founder of Gestalt Therapy said that “by remaining alert in the center, we can acquire a creative ability of seeing both sides of an occurrence and of completing an incomplete half. By avoiding a one-sided outlook, we gain a much deeper insight to the structure and function of the situation. For example, “the present is the ever-moving zero-point of the opposites past and future”, where creative indifference informs and balances the polar differentiation while not becoming it. (Perls, Hefferline, and Goodman. 1994. *Gestalt Therapy*)