
Converting Bias and Racism in Your Workplace: A Primer for Minorities in the Business World

- G.L. Harris



Mindfulness and Wise action make a badass better

Understanding people and their sources of motivation is a choice you must make to be successful. Mindfulness is similar to intuition, but it is a proactive skill that can become second nature with practice and a little forethought. A step up but relaxed versus intense listening. Knowledge of background, geography, education political leanings etc. can all come from conversation and being there. Paying close attention (mindfulness) in conversations and discussions can also help to confirm business/personal issues, fears and challenges that people are often struggling with.

Our company was acquired in 2008 and we inherited some unhappy accounts that needed relationship building. The dust hadn't settled when a particularly large Global Medical industry leader demanded our presence. One division had huge opportunities but was unhappy with our merger partner. Our previous company (Ault) had great success at a sister division so they decided to give our combined entity an audience as they were considering new suppliers for a new product line.

This was a huge opportunity so the president (who was new) called out the troops. Our CEO (new to me), President, VP of ops, VP of Engineering and the 2 VPs of Sales and Marketing (who was staying, still undecided) all flew to Seattle for the meeting.

The other sales guy and I both had minimal roles, each describing projected product lines and customers in the industry (2 slides max) for 12 mins. Then came financial strength, operations integration, technology and engineering capabilities all focused on the New Company and how great we would be.

I settled in early and watched and absorbed the aura, questions and lack of interest. I went into a "mindful" listening stage, focusing on the customer, not what my team was saying, the past or potential business to be had.

The key player/GM was pleasant and intense but distant. He had the 'heard it all before' look throughout the 2 and a half hour presentation and his only questions revolved around 'how were we different or better than other power supply companies most of which were already our 'new' size or larger. He was a stoic, meticulous, very analytical driver, with a slight disability and very European (German), having told us he rose through the ranks in corporate offices in Holland and was determined to fix issues and be successful here in the states. I watched, took in how he responded (or didn't respond) to everything that was said for the next 90 minutes.

It was not going well and first our president, then the CEO, each tried to convince him there was a difference. As we wound down to our 3 HR time limit (and he was watching) I interrupted the CEO's closing comments at a pause and asked if I could make a comment. He said yes, intending to gather himself for one last charge I'm sure.

My comment, "Mr P., what I can tell you is that if you chose us to participate, we will make YOU successful ". His eyebrows jumped up.

"We will follow your lead and suggestions and help you to meet your goals and the objectives of the division. If we have problems, as all power supply companies do, we will respond in ways that will not leave you exposed or the division in jeopardy". Hint of a smile.

"When you return to the Netherlands you will leave a legacy of choosing the right partner for the Entire organization. We can COMMITT to that."

Everyone in the meeting Saw the ensuing smile, then the turn to the CEO, "please go on". Our CEO finished with a recommitment to what I said (in his words) and we received a commitment from them to move to the next level of qualification and left on time.

In the van to the airport the ops guy asked "what just happened, we were losing?" The CEO answered "Greg just read his mind. It was all about him (Mr P)."

We won the business, still have it now. The next week I was awarded the sales and Marketing VP job, and the other sales VP was let go. Two years later Mr. P was promoted to running all of the U.S. and supported us for supplier of the year. The CEO and I grew to be friends and still are.

I was mindful of his background, who he was and was able to sense what things where not important and took a shot at what I sensed might be most important- His Success. All from just being 'Mindful'. I am grateful for having developed Mindfulness in life.
