

DEAR DR. MAZIE,

Sometimes at work I feel devalued. Whether it's at a project meeting or a casual lunch, I feel like people aren't listening or including me in the conversation. I voice my opinions, but then no one acknowledges what I've said. Or someone interrupts me to make their own point. It's hard to admit, but sometimes I have these overwhelming feelings of rejection. What is the best way to deal with this so I can stay focused on my job?

Jimmy in North Dakota



While it's not often talked about, rejection at work has happened to most of us at one time or another. And when it happens, it can feel horrible. That's because rejection is one of the toughest social challenges we can face. And since we spend at least a third of our adult life at work, the alienation that comes with not feeling like you are part of the team can really hurt. So how can we handle these feelings of rejection in a mature and positive manner?

The first step is checking your perspective. See if you can step back and think about the situation as if you were another person looking at it objectively. Is it possible that someone else was just totally insensitive? More often than not, people are so impatient to get their own opinions heard, they don't even realize that they interrupted someone else. Coworkers can be completely oblivious as to how their actions impact another person.

You also have to ask yourself whether what you are experiencing is legitimate or possibly a misperception of a situation. We may overreact to a situation because on some unconscious level it reminds us of something similar from our past. And if that previous experience was negative, we might be repeating an old response. I know this can easily happen because of what I saw during my 30 years of marriage counseling.

Couple after couple would come for marriage therapy, and I'd listen as one of them complained about the way they were treated by their spouse. As the full picture of the marriage unfolded before me, I discovered that the 'complainer' had experienced a bad relationship with someone previously. Whether it was a parent or a previous mate, the remnant of that hurt was so deeply imbedded in them that it didn't take much to bring it to the surface and make them bleed emotionally. Neither individual understood that these feelings and reactions were unrelated to their marriage. It would take several sessions to unravel the past situation and let the hurting individual find true healing.

Getting a new perspective may also help you to better understand a situation. Is there someone at work you can talk with privately to discuss your feelings? A manager, supervisor, mentor or coworker can help you become more attuned to the social side of relationships at work and the way you come across to others. Ask this person for honest feedback, and be open to new revelations. Take whatever appropriate actions might be needed.

Whatever the outcome, be careful not to let any bad, mad or sad feelings cause you to become bitter. If you don't monitor your tongue, it's easy to let hurt feelings come out in ugly and snide remarks about other people, especially those who may have caused you to feel rejected in the first place.

It's not an easy process, but the key is to let go of the bad feelings. This can only be accomplished if you are determined to move forward. Just remember that holding on to bad feelings is about the most self-destructive thing we can do to ourselves. That's because the person we hurt most is ourselves. So let go and move forward. Take action. Invite the person you feel rejected you to lunch and start anew.

As the famous actor, singer and sausage king Jimmy Dean said, "I can't change the direction of the wind, but I can adjust my sails to always reach my destination."

A nationally recognized speaker, workshop leader and trainer, Dr. Mazie Leftwich, Psy.D has a clinical background in applied psychology with expertise in organizational and personal development. She is Senior Vice President of Contract Land Staff, LLC, where she oversees training and team excellence programs.

