



Exercise: Practicing Non-Judgmental Interpretations

When we interact with a distressed employee, it is natural to try to understand what is motivating their negative emotions and reactions. We can often be quite accurate when ascertaining the causes of and contributors to other people's *positive* emotion states. One of the traps we may fall into, however, when dealing with negative emotions in the workplace, is making simplistic and judgmental interpretations, such as:

"Tim's always upset with coworkers because he's a jerk."

"Nicole is always on the verge of tears because she's such a softie."

"Danielle is always anxious when there are tight deadlines because she's not cut out for her position."

Judgmental interpretations are often wrong, and almost always completely unhelpful. Taking the time to develop a non-judgmental understanding of workers, their behaviours, and their reactions to situations is critical to managing them effectively.

Spend a day noticing your thoughts, assumptions and judgments about others. Be aware of how many of these thoughts are objective or factual (e.g., "Tim is speaking to his coworker in a loud voice") versus how many are based on subjective or unfounded assumptions or judgments (e.g., "Tim is a jerk"). What percentage of your thoughts were objective/factual versus judgmental? Actively work on catching your judgmental thoughts and translating them into objective, factual descriptions. This can be important in helping you develop constructive and non-judgmental interpretations of workplace situations and behaviours. This process takes time and practice, but will eventually start to feel natural.