

### Work and the 4-Way Stop



There's a 4-way Stop right by my house and I frequently travel on the road where it is located. I have come to notice that the 4-way Stop has many parallels at work and I wanted to share them with you today to see just what can be learned in traffic.

I've identified 4 different "characters" at the 4-way Stop that closely resemble folks in the workplace. Which one are you? Who do your coworkers and customers resemble? What can you do about any of this?

#### Character #1: *Overeager Ed*

*Overeager Ed* is going through the stop sign even though it's not his turn. He just doesn't care that you got there first and you better watch out or he will plow into you. Know anyone like this at work? They are often the workplace bullies that push their way through meetings and memos. They are maddening. "It's not fair" you think - although that does you little good.

#### Character #2: *Hesitant Hannah*

*Hesitant Hannah* lets everyone else go through the stop sign even though it is her turn. People get confused - they aren't sure who will go next. There can be light flashing, hand waving, honking - it's just very confusing. Do you have a "Hannah" in your office? These passive folks think they are doing everyone a favor by stepping aside to let others "go first", but in reality, they are short changing the system and making things confusing. You just wish they would step up and move!

#### Character #3: *Devious Dave*

*Devious Dave* is on the cell phone and doesn't appear to be paying attention. When you get sick of waiting and decide to go, he pulls out in front of you as if to say, "Hey, it's my turn - what are you doing?" Dave is well aware of the situation, he just doesn't let on. When was the last time you saw this type of passive aggressive behavior at work? Passive aggressive folks say one thing and do another - they send confusing messages and make team work impossible.

#### Character #4: *Take Your Turn Tess*

*Take Your Turn Tess* approaches the 4 way stop with respect. She is paying attention and she let's others take their turns (in order of arrival) and then advances through the stop herself. She would make her driver's ed teacher proud. There's a full stop, acceleration speed is on target and all is well at the 4-way Stop. Well I'm sure you have plenty of folks like Tess in your office - they are the assertive ones. They take the time to acknowledge everyone else's position and advance in a respectful manner. They step up to take their turn and let other's take theirs.

So what do you do if you're *Take Your Turn Tess* and you encounter *Overeager Ed*, *Hesitant Hannah* or *Devious Dave* at an office intersection? Well of course, you need to *SHIFT* your gears to effectively navigate the cross roads.

Here's how it works:

Aggravating Situation: One of your coworkers is being aggressive, passive or passive aggressive.

#### **S: Stop and breathe**

By consciously stopping yourself before you go into "habit mode" - you can plot the course for dealing with this person. The breath helps you focus and sends oxygen to your blood. It also keeps you from saying something you might later regret because you can't breathe in and talk at the same time!

#### **H: Harness Knee Jerk Reactions**

In this case, your knee jerk reactions will vary depending on which character you are dealing with. For example, *Hesitant Hannah* might elicit an impatient response and unkind words about making a decision and moving forward. Consciously put a stop to these reactions before they get you in trouble.

#### **I: Identify and manage negative emotions**

Your negative emotions will vary depending on the person. The key is to take a few minutes to recognize what you are feeling. Then, and only then, will you be able to manage the emotions. I'm not suggesting you just put on a happy face. I'm suggesting that you manage the emotions through some of the options you will work on in the next step.

#### **F: Find new options** (come up with as many as you can before deciding what new path to take)

For *Overeager Ed* try talking to him when you're no longer at the 4-way Stop - when things have calmed down.

When dealing with *Hesitant Hannah*, ask a few questions and engage in a dialogue to see what she thinks or how she can contribute.

If *Devious Dave* shows up on your journey, let him know that you know what he's up to by calling him on the behavior in an assertive, respectful way.

#### **T: Take one positive action**

You get to pick. Just choose to safely navigate this current STOP sign. Choose one action that will be more productive and achieve better results than sitting and stewing in traffic.

When you *SHIFT* on a regular basis, your travels will go more smoothly and the STOP signs at work will turn into green lights!

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