

Relationship Toxins and Antidotes

Toxins:

- Relationship toxins are destructive ways team members communicate with each other that can erode performance and destroy trust.

Antidotes:

- Antidotes are behaviors that help you constructively reframe your use of or response to a toxin.

How antidotes work:

1. For each behavior there is an antidote that neutralizes their toxicity whether you are the receiver or the giver.
2. Responding with one of the antidotes might feel like swallowing your pride, but you will like the results.
3. When you stop using these behaviors, you will see that your colleague will also stop
4. These toxic behaviors often happen when people are feeling powerless vis-à-vis the situation they're in. So, it might seem paradoxical but when somebody uses a toxin, bring them more into their power.

Toxin #1 - Criticism/Blame

Criticizing someone's character rather than attacking their argument or complaining about a failed behavior is a fairly common toxin. It makes the victim feel assaulted, rejected, and hurt.

Antidote:

If the criticism is coming from you:

- Complain about the *behavior*, not the person.

If you are being criticized:

- Listen for the reasonable response embedded in the criticism and respond to that.
- Avoid a defensive response that will only make the situation worse.

When you are the critic	<p><i>Don't say:</i> "You failed to tell me she was waiting!"</p> <p><i>Say this instead:</i> "I don't want to miss an opportunity to speak with her personally as she is always pressed for time. Can we discuss a way to let me know she is here, regardless of what I am doing? "</p>
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When you are being criticized	<p><i>Don't say:</i> "You didn't tell me you had to speak with her."</p> <p><i>Say this instead:</i> "I'm sorry. How would you feel about me letting you know she is here, regardless of what you are doing? Is there a way to do that so it won't be too disruptive?"</p>
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Toxin #2 – Defensiveness

Defensiveness is protecting yourself from criticism, exposure of your shortcomings, or other real or perceived threats to the ego. Its perceived effect is blame. It is similar to and often the result of being criticized or blamed.

Antidote:

If you feel defensive:

- Repeat what you heard and ask for clarification.
- Ask yourself if there is even a small amount of truth in what your colleague is saying.

If your colleague is getting defensive:

- Ask what they heard you say
- Show your colleague that you respect and trust her.
- Apply active listening skills

<p>When you want to avoid making a colleague feel defensive</p>	<p><i>Don't say:</i> "I cannot imagine why you made this decision!"</p> <p><i>Say this instead:</i> "I'm hearing you say that you made the decision you thought would best serve the practice. Is that right?"</p>
<p>When you feel defensive</p>	<p><i>Don't say:</i> "Do not accuse me of having poor judgement!"</p> <p><i>Say this instead:</i> "I'm hearing you say that my judgement is poor. Can you clarify that?"</p>

Toxin #3 - Contempt

Contempt includes sarcasm, belittling, cynicism, name-calling, hostile humor, and belligerence. It conveys disgust and condescension. It is harmful to the physical health of an individual and those around him or her. It is *the most damaging of all toxins*

Antidote:

If you are about to respond to a colleague with contempt:

- Pause. Make what you want or need about you, not about the perceived shortcomings of others. "I feel...I want..." takes the other person out of it.

If your colleague is being contemptuous

- Express your feelings, identify the unwanted behavior, and indicate a willingness to resolve the situation without contemptuous behavior

<p>If you are feeling contempt toward a colleague</p>	<p><i>Don't say:</i> "You failed to make that call AGAIN? Now it's too late. You blew it. What's wrong with you?"</p> <p><i>Say this instead:</i> "I'm disappointed that you didn't make that call as we discussed. I'd like to understand why. Can we talk about it?"</p>
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<p>If a colleague's contempt is aimed at you</p>	<p><i>Don't say:</i> "What's wrong with ME? You're the one with the problem!"</p> <p><i>Say this instead:</i> "Are you aware of the negative impact your words make? Is that your intention?"</p>
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Toxin #4 – STONEWALLING

Stonewalling includes cutting off communication, silent treatments, refusals to engage, withdrawal, or in mild cases simply being reluctant to express directly what you are thinking. Sometimes this behavior is the result of the other toxins running wild, thus creating a need to "shut down."

Antidote:

You are about to stonewall a colleague:

- Temporarily remove yourself from the conversation without blaming anyone for your uneasiness. Use meditation or any other calming technique to feel more relaxed and better able to communicate effectively. Try to have the conversation again.

If your colleague is stonewalling you:

- Look to yourself to identify any behavior that might have caused your colleague to not feel safe speaking up to you. Provide reassurance and follow through.

<p>If you catch yourself stonewalling a colleague</p>	<p><i>Don't say:</i> "We're not having this discussion!" (exits)</p> <p><i>Say this instead:</i> "I know we need to discuss this but give me a little room to gather my thoughts so I can see things in a more neutral light."</p>
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<p>If a colleague stonewalls you</p>	<p><i>Don't say:</i> "We are going to talk about this NOW! I insist!"</p> <p><i>Say this instead:</i> "We will need to discuss this at some point. Do you need time to think it through first? Or "Am I doing something that makes you feel like we can't discuss this?"</p>
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Summary - Antidotes *to* Toxins

- Complain about a specific behavior instead of criticizing the person.
- Go one step further and turn those complaints into requests instead. Examples:
 - Instead of saying “you didn’t tell me about the event”, say “I don’t want to miss another one of those events; what do you think of putting all events in the company calendar from now on? Will you do it?”.
 - If your partner is being critical: Listen for the reasonable request embedded in the complaint. If you hear “you didn’t tell me about the event”, simply say: “I’m sorry. Would you like me to add this kind of events to the company calendar so that it is not an issue in the future?”
- Remember that requests are not demands. A true request, leaves open the choice a negative answer as a valid response.

Summary - Antidotes *for* Toxins

- Don’t make the situation personal: By being clear that blame won’t get you anywhere, you can focus on the changes the two of you need to make to take care of the issue.
- When receiving criticism, hold the attitude that the person criticizing you doesn’t want to make you feel bad or nag you. Discuss how they can present complaints and criticism in a more useful and acceptable manner to you.
- Look at what’s your contribution to the problem you’re feeling critical about or being criticized for.
- Take responsibility and apologize when appropriate. Even if in your opinion you weren’t being critical, what counts is what the listener experienced. Remain curious about the impact of what you say and clean up any messes.

Activity:

The following demonstrates each of the 4 relationship toxins. Take a minute to study each and then write down your responses. Be prepared to share! Just do your best - there will be no judgement!

Toxin #1 – CRITICISM

“We should never have this many patients waiting! Why aren’t you managing this better?”

What would your response be if this criticism was aimed at you?

How would you rephrase this criticism if you were the critic?

Toxin #2 – DEFENSIVENESS

“I am picking up the slack here and, as usual, you are not helping!”

What would your response be if this defensive statement was aimed at you?

How would you rephrase this if you were the one being defensive?

Toxin #3 – CONTEMPT

You are so cold and unfeeling! We all notice it and even some patients have mentioned it. It embarrasses us all!

What would your response be if this contemptuous statement was aimed at you?

How would you rephrase this if you were the one making this contemptuous statement?

Toxin #4 – STONEWALLING

"I don't know what you want me to say. I have to get back to work."

What would your response be to a colleague if they were stonewalling you?

How would you rephrase this if you were about to stonewall your colleague?