

What Kind of Contagion Are You?

By Bonnie Budzowski

Scientists can now verify—by recording physiological data as two people have a conversation in a lab—that one person transmitting an emotional signal can literally alter the person receiving the message in the following areas:

- Hormone levels,
- Cardiovascular function,
- Sleep rhythms
- Immune functions

Of course, you don't need a laboratory to know that a charged emotional episode can leave you physiologically altered for hours. We say things like, "My colleague made me so mad that I couldn't sleep all night." We know that bad moods and negatively-charged episodes are bad contagions.

What we seldom realize is that the reverse is also true. Good moods and pleasant encounters are good contagions. Research shows that managers who are optimistic have statistically higher rates of employee retention than those who are negative. Professionals who are upbeat and likeable are more successful at winning commitment and cooperation than those who are not.

The key principle here is to practice a positive attitude and communication style—because you are a contagion in the lives of others--for good or for bad, like it or not. In the busyness of a work day, the difference can be subtle.

When you think about yourself as a contagion you, might consider the following questions:

1. **What's your conversation style like?** When you are asked to make a list of your hobbies, is it appropriate to list "chronic complaining" as one of your hobbies?
2. **How do you handle conflict?** What percent of your communication can be categorized as blaming and what percent can be categorized as seeking win-win solutions?
3. **How do you handle resources?** What percentage of your communication is involved in giving, in mentoring, in providing resources for others verses focusing on your own needs?
4. **How frequently do you take the time to express appreciation** to your co-workers and customers?
5. **What are your subtle habits around facial expression?** What percentage of your time is spent smiling? What percent is spent frowning?

The answers to these questions will tell you what kind of contagion you are. You'll know what to do from there.

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