

Caring About the Happiness of Others

BY THEA MATHEWS

COLUMBUS, OHIO

Eighteen months ago, I had the best supervisor in the world. Then he resigned. He had been instrumental in helping our plant improve its production performance. We mutually respected each other's work. He respected my contribution to the plant and showed it with promotions and raises that I really needed to support my family. He was also instrumental in securing my position when the plant had been threatened with closing, and I worked hard to let him know his efforts and confidence in me were not wasted.

Working for someone you both respect and like is rare. I was really sorry to see him go. So I chanted for the next supervisor to be even better than the one who left, and that he would take our plant to the next level so it wouldn't have to close.

Six weeks later, my new supervisor, Jerry, arrived. Since I had been chanting for a great new manager, I was sure I would really like and respect him. But after several weeks, I asked, "Where has my daimoku gone wrong?" He was so awful — he proudly displayed his negativity like a suit of shining armor.

Our personalities clashed in every way. He acted like a chauvinist and a bigot and gave me a hard time about everything I did. Meanwhile, he and the other manager would take long lunches, run errands together and hang out in his office talking sports all the time. Jerry also didn't seem to care about the plant and its problems.

Our plant was really suffering because of poor staffing and large volumes of work. We struggled every week to fulfill our goals. In spite of that, two weeks after he started as plant manager, he left on vacation and was gone one week every month for the next nine months. To be honest, sometimes it was for training, but mostly it was for vacation. And when he was gone, Jerry left the other manager in charge, who didn't even care enough to put in the time and effort to ensure our performance was up to standard. Every time something went wrong when Jerry was gone, somehow I got blamed for it.

I began to hate Jerry and my job with a passion. Unfortunately, I was trapped. My husband, Bruce, had two years of school left, and I just didn't feel that finding another job was an option for me.

Then February came around. Time to read the "clear mirror" guidance. Every year I groan about reading it, and every year I'm glad I do. This time was no different. I realized I had been avoiding facing this situation with my practice and chanting about it. I decided that every day I would chant to understand Jerry and for him to become happy — no matter how angry and negative I felt toward him! Theoretically, I know everyone has a Buddha nature, but I was sure this guy must be the exception to the rule.

After several more weeks of no breakthrough, one day I was struggling to chant. In the midst of my daimoku, I recalled how I felt when I first came to Columbus. I remembered how frightened and lonely I had been. I recalled how when these feelings were strongest, I could be nasty to other people for no reason. I realized that when people are suffering, they find it difficult to care about and be nice to others. Then I felt that maybe, just maybe, my supervisor was not a creep, but just very unhappy.

He had moved from a place where, culturally, he was comfortable and had lots of friends and was close to his family. Here, he felt different, had trouble making friends and was far away from his family. He had come from a warm climate to a cold, rainy climate, and couldn't get out to play sports and do things he loved to do. He had gained a lot of weight since he arrived, and that was making him unhappy, too. I realized that as miserable as I was, he was miserable as well, and that instead of trying to support and understand him, I

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had wanted him to support and understand me. I was acting as selfish as he was.

That self-realization made me care about his happiness as much as I care about mine. Now chanting for his happiness became easy. Over time, things started to change for both of us. Although sometimes he and I had setbacks, he started coming in my office and talking with me about his life and what he was going through. Understanding him better, I no longer offended him when we needed to resolve differences. I helped him learn more about Columbus.

Jerry started to reward me for my efforts at work and encourage me when he felt I'd done something particularly well. As a result, when he did criticize my performance, I could see it as encouragement to do better. I also chanted for him to have someone in his life who cared about him. He became friends with another guy in the plant, and they began doing social things together. He started losing weight. Then he met a woman, and they really cherished each other.

Last September, our work volume was low and Jerry had to decide which manager to lay off. Because he now recognized how committed I had been to my work and keeping the plant open, he laid off the other manager. I was stunned. If he had faced this decision six months earlier, I know that the manager he would have laid off would have been me.

This relationship has gone beyond my best expectations. I can now say I really respect Jerry. Now it's OK that we don't always agree. I can accept that everyone doesn't have to see things my way all the time. I look forward to seeing him every day and truly wish for his continued happiness.

In the open letter by our SGI-USA women's division chief, Wendy Clark ("How Will We Make a 'Great' America?" Aug. 30, 1996, *World Tribune*), she writes: "First, I think we must accept the fact that differences do indeed exist among us.... Second, we must deeply respect one another's humanity in spite of our apparent differences. Everyone, after all, possesses the Buddha nature.... Because when you think about it, it all boils down to simply caring about someone's happiness as we do our own." How true.

Overcoming my tendency to be abrasive has improved my relationships with others as well. Experiencing how, based on daimoku, you can create a wonderful relationship out of what seems like a hopelessly bad one has convinced me that I can continue closing the gaps between myself and others whenever and wherever they appear.

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