

Hello, everyone. This is Wayne Rivers at FBI and We Build Better Contractors.

This week, I want to talk about *'Life is Too Short'* in the context of what I've learned over a 50-year working lifetime. I just turned 60 a couple weeks ago, and I think when you change decades, forty, fifty, sixty, et cetera, those birthdays tend to cause you to reflect, to look backward and to look forward.

And so, I was thinking, and I've been working since I was 10 years old, mowing lawns and delivering papers and eventually bagging groceries. And I did all the terrible jobs that young people have to do to learn how to work. So, what have I learned over those 50 years? And gosh, everything that I know I've learned through experience, often by making horrible, insane mistakes. But the main thing that I think I can impart to you is this; life is too short to put up with toxic or rotten people. That is my number one takeaway from 50 years of working with and for other people.

Now, how do you know if someone with whom you work is a toxic personality. I think there are three things that I look for. The first thing is, do they exhaust you? Do you leave interactions with those people angry, frustrated, dejected, feeling less than you did when you entered into it? Second, I think there was a book by this title. Are they energy vampires? Do they suck the energy and the life out of you when you have to interact with them? When you have to interact with one of these people, do you dread that upcoming interaction? And the third question is, are they always surrounded by drama? Do other people complain about them? Do customers complain about them? One way you can tell, there's a test. When this person speaks or makes a statement or asks a question. If you notice other people in the room rolling their eyes, eye rolling is a real terrific indicator for people who are not to be taken seriously or people who may be toxic or have other indicators, watch body English. If people roll their eyes, that could mean something.

So, in American Lawyer Magazine, I think the editor's name is Aric Press. And I'm going to read this to you, so I get it absolutely right. And he's talking about law firms, of course, but it can apply to construction companies. Ask yourself this question, "Why do we put up with toxic behavior? If the answer is 2,500 billable hours, at least you will have identified your priorities without incurring the cost of a consultant." I think that is really profound. He says priorities. I think he means values. If your values are people get their jobs done on time, on budget and you don't care one wit about how they interact with the other people in the organization, how they contribute to your culture or detract from your culture, if that's not on your radar screen, I think that says a lot about your values. You can have values and you can preach them in the organization, but your actions speak much, much, much, much louder than your words. So, you can say you have values, but how you demonstrate those values is a different thing.

We have a little graphic here for you to look at. Simon Sinek is a famous thought leader, TED Talk, YouTube guy. And he talked about working with the Navy Seals. How do the Navy Seals choose the people that are going to go out on their teams? And you would think Navy Seals or any branch of the military, they want people who are high performers in the field. So, your high performers, it's the north direction, low performers, south direction, low trust would be direction east, high trust direction west in the graphic.

Everybody, you would think, wants that superstar – anybody in the top part of the northeast quadrant, everybody wants the superstars. Down in the southwest quadrant, nobody wants the people that are low performance and low trust, right? Okay, so that makes perfect sense. What about the person that's really, really high performance, but low trust? No, the Navy Seals don't want that person. They would rather take a lower field performer that's a high trust person. That's what they want, is high trust. Now obviously, they want high performance with high trust, we all do. But given a choice between a high performer with low trust and a lower performer with high trust, you should probably take the high trust person every time.

If you have project managers, and this happens all the time, you have foremen or project managers and you keep them around because they always bring their projects in on time and on budget, irrespective of their personality and how they

contribute to the culture, that tells you so much about your values. If you think about your incentive system, incentives are almost always geared to project performance. So, you're taking your money. And you're saying to people, "You can get more of it. You can make more money. You can enhance your own financial wellbeing by doing this." And it's almost always weighted to hard measures, budget, schedule. It's almost never weighted towards, "How do you treat your people? How do you treat our customers? How do you contribute to the culture?" That says an awful lot about your incentive system, doesn't it? It's not weighted toward your values, it's weighted towards money, okay?

What do toxic people cost you? Well, obviously they cost you time. They reduce cooperation. They reduce harmony in the organization. The main thing though, I think they do, toxic people in the organization reduce psychological safety. And they cause you to have higher turnover. Your great players do not want to work with toxic people. Okay, fine, they bring their jobs in on time and on budget, but they're rotten people. They're difficult people. They're angry people or troubled people. Your A-players don't want to work with those folks.

Now, what happens? If you have an employee that you've identified as a toxic employee or a toxic customer for that matter, what do you do? There're only two things you can do, really. Number one, you have to try to rehabilitate, and that rehabilitation starts with you. So, evaluating your own thoughts and feelings, et cetera. And then trying to communicate to the employee a better way, why this is important, why fitting in with your values and your culture is just as important, if not more important, than bringing in the jobs on time and on budget. Same thing with the customer, you've got to try and rehabilitate that relationship first.

What if you cannot rehabilitate an employee or customer? What do you do? Tough love. Those people are better off in other places. Those employees are going to be happier working in a culture where they can thrive using their methodology, if you will. Those customers are going to be happier working with another contractor that is more in line with their own attitudes and beliefs, okay? Tough love is exactly what it is. You're loving on that person by putting them in a better place, but you're also being tough. And when I say tough, it hard. It's heart wrenching, but sometimes you have to make those breaks.

I'd like to hear what you've learned in your 20 or 30 or 50 years in the workplace. Is it that life is too short to put up with toxic people or are there some other great revelations that you've learned that I can learn from, from your experience in business? This is Wayne Rivers at FBI, We Build Better Contractors.