

# ■ Coming to a workplace near you: Extreme Personality Makeover!

by Tom Terez

The first (and last) time I watched Extreme Makeover, the reality TV show in which a weekly batch of people get overhauled by a team of cosmetic surgeons and dentists, I had three immediate reactions: (1) My nose looks pretty good after all. (2) I've permanently lost my appetite. (3) This emphasis on the physical is overdone. What we need is a show called Extreme *Personality* Makeover. And we need it to be set in the work environment.

If you have a difficult boss or co-worker, you're probably nodding in furious agreement. It's a thrill to imagine: The camera crew rolls in, the subject is stuck under a spotlight, then colleagues weigh in with what they'd like to change. A prize could be offered to the one of several people who maintains the desired changes for a full month.

Sounds good, right? Well, here's something better – a show with a twist. Let's say Susan wants her manager to have an Extreme Personality Makeover.

She calls the studio and unloads about her awful boss, and on the appointed day, the film crew shows up at her workplace. Susan expects the focus to be on her boss, but she gets a whopper of a surprise. The show turns things around by zooming in on the person (her!) who wants someone else to change.

So Susan goes from being the intended changer to the one being changed. It is her colleagues – including her boss – who go about deciding what

to change and wielding the behavioral scalpel.

Farfetched? Sure it is. But you have to wonder: While you're busy wishing that others would change, are you missing the need to change yourself? It's unlikely you need an extreme personality makeover – there are wonderful qualities in just about every personality. But perhaps you need the personality equivalent of a nip, tuck, or subtle angle correction.

But how do you know whether to change? How do you know what to change and how to change? It's not as easy as looking in a mirror and seeing the sideways lean of a nose that lost big in a game of grade-school dodge ball. And it's certainly not as easy as a few trips to a cosmetic surgeon.

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For starters, take time for reflection. Think about the recent high points and low points in your relationships with colleagues. Perhaps you recently clashed with a co-worker over a missed deadline. You blamed him, he blamed you, and both of you are still simmering. So look in the mirror by asking yourself some tough questions: At what point did the situation turn negative? What did you do that may have led to the conflict? If you could redo the experience, what would you do differently?

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The circumstances *will* occur again. Will you respond differently – or reenact from the same script?

Sometimes, it's less about what we do and more about what we value. For example, say you prize efficiency ("it doesn't matter if we have a few typos, as long as we finish writing this report in the next half hour") while a colleague places greater importance on having a perfect finished product ("let's spend an extra half hour to weed out any typos and strengthen some of the sections"). When these kinds of situations arise, try to decipher the underlying differences in values. Then reassess: Does that high priority of yours still make sense? Can it flex in this situation? Should it? How about in future situations?

If you have a trusting relationship, inside or out of the workplace, have your friend serve as a sounding board. Tell her about some of the work situations that are getting you to think anew about the old you. Many people gain understanding by putting their thoughts and feelings into spoken words. If you're that type, you'll benefit even if

your friend just sits back and listens. Or you can ask her for feedback and guidance. In this way your friend can be a mirror, helping you look at yourself in new ways.

So what about it? Are you ready to appear on Extreme Personality Makeover? How about Subtle Personality Adjustment? Putting yourself in the spotlight won't be as fun as trying to change someone else, but as you change, so will the outcomes of many workplace situations. And your new way of doing things just might inspire your colleagues to think about how they too can change for the better.

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