

Dealing with bullies

Busy, successful executives have learned to be nice

BY ANDRIA LISLE

When "Jerry Maguire" was released a decade ago, the Hollywood blockbuster seemed just that — an improbable fictional tale about a sports agent who awoke one morning with a heart of gold.

Even the film's catch phrase, "Show me the money," signals the high stakes and cutthroat attitude that Maguire, played by Tom Cruise, encounters on the front lines while making his million-dollar deals. Yet, says legendary sports agent and attorney Ronald Shapiro, it doesn't have to be that way.

Shapiro represents dozens of Hall of Famers, including Cal Ripkin Jr. He settled the infamous Major League Baseball umpire strike, and serves as adviser to the owners of the Baltimore Ravens and the San Antonio Spurs. Via his Shapiro Institute, he consults hundreds of corporate clients, ranging from Merrill Lynch and Wachovia Bank to Verizon, the Wharton School of Business and the Social Security Administration. He's also an author and lecturer who's channeled his invaluable advice

into three books, *The Power of NICE, Bullies, Tyrants & Impossible People* (both co-authored by Mark Jankowski and published by Crown Business) and the upcoming *Dare to Prepare: How to Win Before You Begin*.

"In terms of visibility, the cutthroat nature is more visible," Shapiro admits. "It's usually the impossible people who get the headlines."

The best line in "Jerry Maguire," he insists, isn't "Show me the money," it's "Help me help you."

"My son is the general manager of the Cleveland Indians, and my son-in-law coaches the New York Jets," Shapiro says. "They're both held in high esteem not because they're tough guys, but because they're good guys who have succeeded."

In the courtroom and on the playing field, Shapiro has seen his share of bullies.

"The essence of *Bullies, Tyrants & Impossible People* is, in a philosophical sense, that you don't have to stoop to their level to control situations that they make frustrating or exasperating. I've created a systematic approach,

which allows you to keep your cool and hopefully take control when you're dealing with them," he says.

"I think that unfortunately, the corporate environment has grown more hostile. As a corporate lawyer, I've watched people become more intense. They're playing for higher stakes, which has caused them to lose some of the gentility that existed decades ago. While there's always been bad people and tough people, today there are much more situationally difficult people, because there's much more pressure. Everybody has deadlines and quotas, and with multi-tasking, everybody has to deliver in ways they've never had to. Our performances are being put under a magnifying glass."

Bill Burtch, principal of Memphis-based corporate coaching firm Harmony Coaching & Consulting, helps mid- to senior-level managers and executives deal with difficult people. He also conducts several coaching clinics for ex-

Harmony Coaching & Consulting
Corporate coaching
Principal: Bill Burtch
Phone: (901) 272-7390
Web site: www.harmonycc.net



Bill Burtch conducts coaching clinics for executives on how to deal with difficult people.

TREY HARRISON

ecutives, managers and corporate leaders (the next session is slated for the Crescent Club in mid-June).

"There's a lot of unproductive, unprofessional behavior out there that's counterproductive to the corporate environment," Burtch says, "but you can take particular actions that mold how people view the situation; preventative steps to avoid some of the common pitfalls."

"Over the last couple of decades," he says, "with the flattening of the corporate structure, there's a lot less opportunity to move up, and the competition becomes more intense for the few opportunities that do exist. That atmosphere of having to do more with less puts people on edge — that pressure to perform and achieve certain directives or results is higher than it's ever been, and jobs are more broad-based, which contributes to a less-than-hospitable work environment that's even more conducive to conflict."

"Read a lot of leadership books," adds Burtch, "and you'll see that some of the best qualities of a leader are transparency and vulnerability. You need to let people see who you are, and what your values are. Share more information with your co-workers, and develop more of a relationship with the individual. Work to develop more collaborative, cooperative techniques."

So, before a situation with an office bully escalates to the point of no return, what can you do?

"The first step is probably the

most important, as far as getting control of yourself," Shapiro says, explaining that he utilizes his own principle, called NICE. "Neutralize your emotions. Identify the type of bully you're dealing with — a situationally difficult person, a strategically difficult person, or a simply difficult person. Control the encounter, and explore your options. I'm a believer that if you learn a simple, systematic approach and you practice it, lo and behold, it will become part of your life."

Memphis Redbirds founder Dean Jernigan has taken Shapiro's advice to heart.

"*The Power of NICE* is Ron Shapiro in capital letters," Jernigan says. "That's how he approaches life. The very fact that he's negotiated hundreds of successful professional sports contracts and helped mediate the umpire strike epitomizes a successful negotiating technique."

"Being nice certainly catches people off guard," adds Jernigan, who has employed Shapiro's techniques with the Redbirds, as CEO of Storage USA, Inc., and in his current position as CEO of Cleveland, Ohio-based U-Store-It Trust.

"Maybe you gain the higher ground in negotiations by being nice," Jernigan says. "If you negotiate to have a win-win result, and leave something on the table without squeezing out one last dollar, that will pay in dividends many times down the road."

It doesn't come easy, Jernigan says.

"People get in a pressure situation

Bullies, Tyrants & Impossible People

HOW TO BEAT THEM WITHOUT JOINING THEM

The Footprint 4-Point Plan for Your Life, Home, and Work

RONALD M. SHAPIRO & MARK A. JANKOWSKI
with James Cole

Bullies, Tyrants & Impossible People
Authors: Ronald M. Shapiro & Mark A. Jankowski
Publisher: Crown Business
Cost: \$25
Web site: www.shapiro negotiations.com

and tend to display other tendencies than being nice," Jernigan says. "And sometimes, being nice is kinda hard to do. I hope people aren't interested in being a Donald Trump look-a-like, but I think some people have natural tendencies that might take them that way," Jernigan says. "Ron Shapiro's wisdom in dealing with them can put you well ahead of the game."

CONTACT freelance writer Andria Lisle at alisle@midsouth.rr.com