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## Stop Workplace Drama

### Train Your Team to Have No Complaints, No Excuses and No Regrets

#### THE SUMMARY IN BRIEF

Gossip. Power struggles. Poor team coordination. These are all symptoms of workplace drama. They are obstacles that can drain your company of its best talent, get in the way of true productivity and profit, and eat away at the effectiveness of your organization — that is, unless a leader steps up and takes responsibility for changing course.

Communications consultant and national speaker Marlene Chism has created an eight-step methodology that breaks through the negative thinking that can contribute to drama in organizations of every kind and size. She has identified the gaps that drama creates — a gap between where your company is and where it aims to be, and the psychological gap that occurs when people are faced with change and the fear that goes with it.

In *Stop Workplace Drama*, Chism shows how to change the way you and your organization confront and work through problems, implement effective management strategies in a drama-filled organization, and find new solutions that create positive growth for every member of your company.

#### IN THIS SUMMARY, YOU WILL LEARN:

- How to create healthy boundaries, get your work needs met and make the most of your valuable time.
- How to seek viable opportunities and take responsibility for your efforts.
- How to instill necessary changes without unleashing fear in your organization.
- How to cut through your personal drama so that it doesn't create further issues at work.
- How to boost morale, maximize your company's potential and put your organization on the road to success.



by Marlene Chism

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# THE COMPLETE SUMMARY: STOP WORKPLACE DRAMA

by Marlene Chism

**The author:** Marlene Chism is a consultant, trainer and professional speaker. She is the founder of the Stop Your Drama methodology — an eight-part process for helping managers and small-business owners identify the barriers that are holding back their teams. She is also the creator of Attitude Builders, a monthly teleseminar program developed for busy managers who want easy staff development with no prep, no plan and no problem. She has shared her processes and programs with companies such as NASA and McDonald's. *Stop Workplace Drama: Train Your Team to Have No Complaints, No Excuses and No Regrets* by Marlene Chism. Copyright © 2011 Marlene Chism. Summarized by permission of the publisher, John Wiley & Sons Inc. 229 pages, \$24.95, ISBN 978-0-470-88573-4. To purchase this book, go to [www.amazon.com](http://www.amazon.com) or [www.bn.com](http://www.bn.com).

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For additional information on the author, go to [www.summary.com](http://www.summary.com) or [www.StopWorkplaceDrama.com](http://www.StopWorkplaceDrama.com).

## Introduction: We Don't Do Drama Here

The Society for Human Resource Management (SHRM) has estimated that it costs \$3,500 to replace one \$8-per-hour employee when all costs — recruiting, interviewing, hiring, training, reduced productivity and so forth — are considered. And SHRM's estimate was actually the lowest of the 17 nationally respected companies who calculated this cost!

Other sources provide the following facts and figures: Employee replacement costs range from 30 to 50 percent of the annual salary of entry-level employees, 150 percent of middle-level employees and up to 400 percent for specialized, high-level employees!

Despite our ability to amass this kind of information, it's difficult to identify where the real drama lies. Some people assume it's all due to turnover, when in reality it comes from an ineffective supervisor and poor interpersonal relationships. In fact, the No. 1 reason for turnover is relationship problems with the boss.

You may think the real drama at home is about the fight you had with your spouse, but it's really about all the times you avoided having the difficult conversation, failing to listen or speak your truth to others or even yourself.

Drama impacts all of us — both at home and at work. It hampers productivity and inhibits personal effectiveness. And the worst part, of course, is that if you can't spot the drama, you can't stop the drama. Nonetheless, most of us try to fix the symptoms instead of identifying the core issues.

## The Drama Versus Your Drama

*The drama* is the situation. *Your drama* is how you react to it. Therefore, while you may not be able to stop *the* drama, you certainly can stop *your* drama. In other words, you may or may not be able to control or change the circumstance, but with some training, you can learn to manage — and alter — your response.

One quote on this concept is by Vivian Greene: "Life is not about waiting for the storms to pass. It is about learning to dance in the rain."

Most people do not know how to separate the drama from your drama, but you can learn to navigate the ship even in a storm — with the right equipment, maintenance and planning.


## What Composes Drama

When trying to identify the common elements in drama, you will always find at least one, if not all three of these core components:

1. A lack of clarity (which can also be referred to as *fog*).
2. A relationship issue.
3. Resistance.

In addition, you may also see any combination of the other five principles in the Stop Your Drama Methodology (the gap, truth, reinvention, energy, creator). These principles work as a system rather than a step-by-step linear process. When you make a shift in any one of the eight areas, the impact will have a ripple effect.

When you experience drama, three questions to ask yourself are:

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1. Where am I unclear?
2. What is the relationship component?
3. What am I resisting?

Once you are able to identify how clarity, relationships and resistance negatively impact your business, you can effectively create a quick solution to help you navigate positive change. ●

## Clear the Fog

There are a million and one potential excuses as to why you are frustrated, stuck and not getting what you want, but there is only one real reason: You are unclear. You have fog that is clouding your vision.

**The premise of the first Stop Workplace Drama principle, “Clear the Fog,” is:**

1. **The one with clarity navigates the ship.**
2. **Clarity can change any situation.**

Once you are clear in your business, you are in charge. You attract the right people to your team. They are working toward the same goal. They are motivated. You become excited. You make decisions that are in agreement with who you are and the values that you hold dear. Your choices support and work in harmony with other parts of your life.

### The Fog

The fog is your inability to focus and your lack of willingness to see the bigger picture. Occasionally, you might have two desires that do not align. For example, your desire for free time is competing with your desire to finish a project, so you procrastinate and start drifting aimlessly.

The fog is any distraction or division that clouds your vision and threatens your commitment. When you are in the fog, you feel confused instead of motivated.

In short: Any time you lose focus and your level of commitment diminishes, you are in the fog — and you are splintered.

### How to Gain Clarity

Being stuck in the fog can cause a lot of confusion and a lack of alignment. The first step to clearing that fog is to gain clarity on your values and goals. Here are three questions you must answer in order to become clear on your objectives:

1. Who am I?
2. What do I want?
3. What am I committed to?

Spend time thinking about this, and put pen to paper.

## The Leader vs. Denial

As a leader, you are required to be open to and see the reality of the situation — and you are required to bring your staff out of denial on a regular basis. If you are letting substandard performance, bickering, backstabbing and other forms of drama erupt in your business, someone is in denial. You may justify this person’s behavior because your company is going through a big change, or you may procrastinate about bringing unwanted behavior to light because you dread the conflict. However, the longer you let it go on, the uglier it is going to get. You can’t escape the responsibility before you. You must constantly balance the task of motivating and leading with bringing your people out of denial.

How you define yourself, what you say you want and what you claim to be committed to will not only help clear the fog, it will also give you your “true north,” so to speak. If you aren’t sure about what you want, you now know what your next step is — to define it. Answering the “what am I committed to” question will clear a lot of fog. If you meditate on these three questions and think deeply about your life and business, you will come to know what behaviors to eliminate, where you are wasting time and what exactly is draining your energy.

Your actions and words either align with what you have just said or they point to significant problems. Either way, you have now gained awareness and cleared the fog. ●

## Identify the Gap

Besides a lack of clarity, the most likely reason that you’re experiencing drama is that you get *stuck in the gap* — the place between where you were and where you want to be. If your goal stretches you even a little, it’s important to keep in mind that your goal always looks easier to achieve than it is.

As a leader, it takes wisdom and recognition to realize that no matter how accessible a goal seems, it nearly always looks easier to achieve than it is. You don’t always know what will be required upfront or the changes and obstacles that may occur along the way.

Whether you are initiating change or being forced to change because of the economy, outside threats, someone else’s decisions or new legislation, any significant adjustment throws you into that gap of the unknown. It’s a place that’s full of surprises where much is required

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of you. Very often, the power of newfound vision and clarity is so strong that it is tempting to jump into the boat with no map and only one oar.

Even small changes can create big drama. This phenomenon is as true for the individual as it is for a small business or large corporation. Identifying the gap is about giving yourself and your team the resources to weather the storm and withstand the drama in the gap. Prepare your team for the gap, and you will enjoy a successful journey.

**The premise of “Identify the Gap” is:**

- 1. The gap is the distance between point A and point B in reference to achievement.**
- 2. The bigger the gap, the bigger the potential for drama.**

If you lead a team of people, it is very important to identify the two types of gaps always present in change. It is equally vital to manage these gaps and communicate their existence to your team. Let’s talk about the two kinds of gaps.

## **The First Gap: The Physical Journey**

The first gap — the physical journey — involves all the practical ways you get from point A to point B. You plan, do a SWOT (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats) analysis and hire the right team. You strategize, put together a marketing plan and so on.

## **The Second Gap: The Nonphysical Journey**

The second gap — the nonphysical journey — comprises all the components of the spiritual, emotional and mental processes you experience while getting from point A to point B.

The second gap is often the more challenging one. Even though you are operating on the nonphysical level, these nonphysical lessons eventually also manifest in the physical realm. These losses may teach you the importance of self-forgiveness, patience and tenacity.

As a leader, you must be aware of the psychological and physical changes your team undergoes when they are threatened with change. One way you lessen the drama is to identify the gap and develop a realistic view of your starting point — including your weaknesses and limitations individually, as a team and even as a company. If you don’t recognize any limitations and weaknesses before your journey begins, you are sure to see them along the way.

Any significant transformation will challenge you to

overcome the drama in either the first or second gap. The sooner you accept this truth, the more fun you can have while navigating the changes you are about to make. ●

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## **Tell Yourself the Truth**

In a nutshell, your unconscious mind controls much of your life. You have programmed habits that run on autopilot. That is why there are so many versions of the truth and so many misunderstandings, hurt feelings and drama. Although our stories protect us — by helping us avoid distasteful information — they can also hamper productivity.

You might be wondering — if our stories are based upon the unconscious, how is it possible to tell yourself the truth?

**The premise of “Tell Yourself the Truth” is:**

- 1. All people live their lives from the stories they believe.**
- 2. Your truth is only one version of a larger reality.**
- 3. Denial is a way to avoid responsibility.**

No matter what you think the truth is, there is always another, bigger reality. Listen for the red flags in the stories your staff tells you: the excuses about why things cannot change, why things just are the way they are and how someone is doing someone wrong.

None of these excuses adds one iota to problem-solving or moving forward — and chances are that a big portion of what you hear is just the story. People resist looking at the bigger reality. We all trust our version of the truth; in fact, most of us initially defend our bad behavior whenever we’re asked to change.

## **Justification Keeps You Stuck**

Have you ever noticed that when you ask someone to change his or her behavior — be it sarcasm, eye-rolling, angry outbursts or stubborn attitude — they will usually respond with something like “Oh, that’s just the way I am”? Justification is one way that people regularly avoid taking personal responsibility. We make excuses for our behavior based on a litany of reasons — personality theory, horoscope and the way we were raised.

A better way to approach these self-awareness tools is to use them to better understand your strengths and weaknesses as a way to make positive change — not to make excuses for bad behavior or irresponsible patterns.

One of the best systems of self-discovery and personal development is the “enneagram,” a personality assess-

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ment based on nine distinct patterns of thinking, acting and feeling that determine the nine major personality types. Dr. David Daniels, author of *The Essential Enneagram: The Definitive Personality Test and Self-Discovery Guide*, explained: “Every human being has three basic needs, the need for security, the need for relationships and the need for getting what we want.

“We try to get these needs met in different ways depending upon our personality type. Sometimes our ways work for us in a leadership capacity and sometimes our methods work against us.”

Dr. Daniels elaborated, “If we want to expand into self-mastery there is a universal growth process [which he calls] the 4 A’s: Awareness, Acceptance, Action and Adherence. You can own your personality instead of letting it own you. Once you own your personality then you are liberated.”

Imagine how liberating a workplace could be if each individual took charge of his responses in a team capacity — without being held captive by dysfunctional thought patterns, actions and truths that do not serve him.

Look differently at what you consider to be the truth about who you are — and consider that no matter what your astrological sign, personality type, life history or habits, you still have choices and the ability to influence change. ●

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### Reinvent and Realign

The way you see yourself has everything to do with how you lead. When your view of who you are changes, so do the results you produce. **“Reinvent and Realign” is all about becoming the person you want to be so that you can align with your values with clarity.** This process will also allow you to mentor your employees to create their identities as individuals who not only empower themselves personally, but also support the team and your organization’s mission.

The notion of self-reinvention is an interesting one; it’s the area of personal development where you will find the most excuses and regrets until action is taken. How many people prefer the status quo even when it is detrimental to their leadership? You have probably heard the excuse “that’s just the way I am” used as a way to justify rude behavior. That rude behavior may eventually lead to a lawsuit and turn into the regret of resisting change.

Eliminating excuses and regrets means aligning with your highest values so you can effectively lead others by

example. Leadership is more than a title.

### Stepping Into a New Identity

To anyone seeking positive change: You can do it — and the time is now. Be who you want to be right this second. Give yourself permission to be excellent, and stop letting others define you. If you need to clean up some old baggage or make amends to move on, then do it now — so you can be proud of who you are now instead of making excuses for who you could have been. In fact, no matter what your previous experiences have been or how you have behaved, your past does not have to equal your future. You can start reinventing and be successful today right from where you are.

Eckhart Tolle, in his book *A New Earth: Awakening to Your Life’s Purpose*, has introduced the following concept concerning success: “Don’t let a mad world tell you success is anything other than a successful present moment. You cannot achieve success; you can only be successful.” Doesn’t that take the pressure off? Success is a state of being, just like the fact that you are a woman or a man. You can’t seek that which you already are.

#### The four questions you must ask yourself are:

1. Who am I?
2. What am I committed to?
3. What actions and behaviors are out of alignment with who I say I am?
4. As a leader am I getting my desired results?

Since you already asked yourself the first two questions in the last section, you should already know what you want. Now ask yourself: Are you taking a left-hand turn to the island called “excuses,” or are you rowing straight to the island called “leadership”? From there, you start reinventing and realigning. Each word, behavior and habit ultimately shines the light on where you really are and whether your deeds match your thoughts and words.

Keep track of all the ways you define yourself, and correct yourself when you are misaligned with your word. As a result, you’ll have a great relationship with yourself — something that becomes the foundation for your relationship with others. ●

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### Stop Relationship Drama

Everything in life is centered on relationships, and relationships exist because of the way in which you think. You can only experience someone or some situation in relationship to yourself; therefore, in order to change anything in your life, you must change the way

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you think about it. When you are willing to see another person differently, you can change your relationship with that person.

## The Premise of Stop Relationship Drama Is This

Relationships are always active first on the nonphysical level. In other words, they exist because of your thinking. You can't even have a relationship with someone until you think about that person, right? When you first meet someone, you form an impression, and your views of that person build and shift as you interact with and observe him or her. In essence, your thoughts influence your behaviors — and thus, your relationship — toward that person.

When your thoughts about yourself change, so does your experience.

But what about all the other relationships you have — to time, money, your past, your imagined future, your body and every other aspect of your life?

## Why Relationships Matter

Your success and ultimately your happiness in life are directly related to the quality and quantity of your relationships. The more connected you feel, the happier you are.

This is equally true in your workplace. Research company Gallup reports on its website that having one good friend at work is essential for employee satisfaction. Good workplace relationships are simply good business. Why? Because nine out of 10 problems that employees encounter at work are people-related. Therefore, you have solved nine out of 10 problems when you focus on developing better workplace relationships.

## Denial Is the Drug of Choice

Managers or business owners frequently know and even admit that drama is present in their workplaces. Denial is the drug of choice for many of us when we face difficult choices.

Awakening from the drug of denial can be painful. When you shed light on another person's incompetence, rude behavior or pattern of which the person was unaware, the person will become defensive. Your staff member may feel attacked or belittled, so make sure you approach these issues with kid gloves. Observe these two rules:

1. Never catch anyone off guard.
2. Always correct in private and do it within a positive, team-oriented approach, with the intention of bringing out the employee's best. ●

## Master Your Energy

All drama has three common elements: a lack of clarity, a relationship component and an energetic component. We have already talked about clarity and relationships; this section is about the energetic component.

**The premise of “Master Your Energy” is: Everything in the universe is made up of energy, and all energy systems work together. Therefore, the leader who understands how to master energy can help bring out the best in others.** In turn, this will help to eliminate much of the complaining and excuses — not to mention turnover, burnout and power struggles.

The cause behind many illnesses is an inability to comprehend energy mastery. Working harder with less contributes to more workplace drama due to misunderstanding and the perception of the lack, limitation and fewer resources to handle the workload.

Energy mastery works from this premise: Since everything in the universe has energy, productivity and well-being are directly related to mastering energy. Mastering energy occurs when we create boundaries, have our needs met, and develop systems to help maximize and leverage time. The better you are at mastering your energy, the higher your personal effectiveness — and the more positive the impact you have on others.

Being in charge of your emotional, mental, spiritual, environmental and physical energy can make you a very positive role model. As *The Power of Full Engagement* authors Jim Loehr and Tony Schwartz state in their book, “The more we take responsibility for the energy we bring to the world, the more empowered and productive we become. The more we blame others or external circumstances, the more negative and compromised our energy is likely to be.”

Think of it this way: Energy is power, and we all lose power in various ways. Some of us do not get enough rest, while others let their minds wander endlessly over problems. By mastering your energy, you can become more empowered and productive.

## Manage Your Goals to Sharpen the Focus

The five kinds of energy are *physical, mental, emotional, spiritual* and *environmental*. All of these work together and impact one another. For example, everyone knows how easy it is to have an emotional outburst (or excess emotional energy) when you're overly tired (lacking physical energy).

Everything is energy — and each type of energy is a portal of sorts. Rather than looking at each component

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separately, realize that any one of these areas can bring about positive changes. If you require rejuvenation and get it, you will have more mental clarity. When you get your team excited about how the company goals contribute to their well-being, you add gas to the tank. When you set boundaries, you create calm instead of chaos. ●

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### Release Resistance

Wouldn't it be awesome if leadership were as easy as setting reachable goals and having a few authentic conversations and everyone would be rowing together? The reality, however, is that life is not that simple. No matter how great you are as a leader, you will face one of the biggest roadblocks to productivity and personal effectiveness: resistance.

Leaders face resistance on a daily basis. Teams resist working together. Individuals resist change. Perhaps you even resist the most difficult parts of your job.

The core of resistance is what author Eckhart Tolle describes in *The Power of Now* as the “non-acceptance of what is.” You avoid because you don't want to face whatever it is that you don't want to face. You complain because you can't deal with a certain situation, or you justify an angry outburst because you cannot accept the hand that has been dealt to you. How many times have you heard the same friend complain about her mean boss or sloppy husband? Complaining denotes an unwillingness or inability to let go of what can't be controlled, or to face and act on what can be changed.

**The premise of releasing resistance is: You cannot solve a problem until you accept the situation. When you jump into a solution before releasing resistance, you will just experience more drama. The solution only comes after you let go of your resistance.**

### The Four Main Patterns of Energy

Resistance can be identified by four main energy patterns. When these are broken, they allow the one who is resisting (you or someone else) to take full responsibility for facilitating or navigating change. Those four main energy patterns are *blame*, *resentment*, *justification* and *judgment*. Resistance is always a state of non-acceptance and an avoidance of responsibility.

Non-acceptance starts as a thought impulse such as “I don't want to go through this (fill in the blank).” That thought triggers an emotional response such as frustration, dread, irritation or guilt, then quickly materializes into more observable behaviors such as angry outbursts,

finger-pointing, blaming as well as subtle behaviors such as avoidance and procrastination. In the end, resistance boils down to an unconscious avoidance of responsibility, which spirals into negativity, then finally into full-blown drama.

### Responsibility Is the Recognition of Choice

Here is a concept to memorize: Responsibility is the recognition of choice.

You need to teach your employees to bring an idea, partial solution or suggestion for moving forward when they come to you with a complaint. The options don't necessarily have to be the best choices or the right ones — but simply recognizing that there are choices will enable someone to leave the victim role behind. They can then find the power to make a suggestion, accept what is or ask for what they want in a way that benefits the whole organization. ●

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### Become a Creator

Always seek out and encourage creative employees who see choices even in difficult times. A key distinction of a creator is someone who recognizes choice. Great employees are the ones who believe in free will.

Dr. Roy F. Baumeister, professor of psychology at Florida State University in Tallahassee, said that a belief in free will predicts better job performance. We are not arguing the point of whether free will exists or not; we are discussing the belief that it's beneficial to act on it. What if there was one question you could ask during job interviews that would determine who would be a responsible worker?

Our belief in choice allows us to create a better workplace.

### The Premise of Becoming a Creator Is This

The path to developing a great team and positive workplace is empowerment. Leaders must be able to develop other creators. Creators take responsibility and see opportunity. They don't blame the economy, another person or a situation. They live life in the flow and from the field of possibilities. “Become a Creator” is a fancy way of saying “take responsibility.”

### Recognize Choice

In order to create, you have to first see yourself as a creator and be willing to recognize the choices that you have.

Self-regulation is important to human performance, not to mention avoiding a lawsuit or keeping a cus-

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tomers. In terms of your business, this means that when a customer is rude, a co-worker is disrespectful or an unwanted change occurs, the damage will be minimal with the person who can self-correct and self-regulate. Even when the boat springs a leak, the empowered and creative employee will choose instead of react. There will be a bigger gap between stimulus and response. Exercising the power of conscious choice lets people feel more empowered; eventually, their programming is changed to a place where emotional intelligence and reacting with grace under fire is the norm rather than the exception.

The first part of being a creator is to recognize choice. Since leadership is about influencing others, a leader's No. 1 duty is to be a role model and teach others about personal responsibility. That means helping others to step out of the old programming of the victim mode and recognize choice. ●

### Conclusion: No Complaints, No Excuses, No Regrets

As long as you are living on this earth, you will experience some obstacles to your peace and prosperity.

But drama is not really the problem. The amount of time you stay in the drama — and the effort you put toward it — is the problem.

Complaints, excuses and regrets only serve to keep the drama alive. We complain when we believe that we're powerless. However, even when you are at the mercy of some unfair action, you still have a say in what happens.

An excuse is just a thought that keeps you stuck. It lives in sayings like "It's too hard," "It may not pay off," "I'm too old," "They may not understand," "Because of my past, it is just not possible."

Any time you are really stuck, ask yourself what excuses keep you from moving forward. Most of us make excuses on a regular basis without even noticing.

*The reason I didn't return your call is because I was too busy.*

*I would have been on time but the traffic was horrible.*

Every excuse is simply one more indicator that you are letting outside circumstances control your life. Excuses strip us of personal power. Try to ask yourself "Where could I be without that excuse?" once in a while; you will see that a self-awareness exercise like this one helps pinpoint places where you get stuck in the old story instead of reinventing and stepping into a new truth.

Regret is often the result of too many excuses. Fail to be responsive one too many times (even though you

### How Creators Concentrate on Outcomes

According to *The Power of TED (The Empowerment Dynamic)* author David Emerald, creators concentrate on the outcomes they are committed to achieving. Rather than merely reacting to problems and focusing on what they don't want, they focus their vision on what they do want. Emerald claims that becoming a creator can definitely make a bottom-line difference for your business. One of his clients — the CEO of a technology services company — reported that they increased the pipeline of prospects four-fold and experienced a 32 percent growth over the previous year — during a period in which many competitors struggled or went out of business. The CEO attributed this growth to implementing TED and focusing everyone in the organization on becoming a creator.

were busy) and you lose a customer. Show up late one too many times and you lose credibility with your peers.

Regrets also come from reacting instead of responding, from failing to think ahead, and from doing what you want to do now without recognizing how it may negatively impact your future. When you are clear about your core values and are more committed to the discipline of living congruently, you will find that you have fewer regrets.

### Ask These Three Questions

So, the next time you experience drama, ask yourself these questions: Where am I unclear? What is my relationship issue? Where am I resisting? Train yourself to ask these each time you experience the chaos of change, the urge to retaliate, the desire to win an argument or the thought that you simply can't go on.

There is no reason to deny or be afraid of the drama — or even your own drama. Embrace what drama has to teach you about yourself, your values and your opportunities for growth. ●

### RECOMMENDED READING LIST

If you liked *Stop Workplace Drama*, you'll also like:

1. ***Fierce Conversations* by Susan Scott.** Scott helps readers transform everyday conversations employing effective ways to get the message across. This guide includes exercises to learn the Seven Principles of Fierce Conversations.
2. ***It's Your Ship* by Capt. D. Michael Abrashoff.** Great advice from a military mind. Abrashoff helps you get the most from your crew.
3. ***Change the Culture, Change the Game* by Roger Connors and Tom Smith.** Learn how to build a culture of accountability in your organization through Experiences, Beliefs, Actions and Results.