

the
navalent
quarterly



OUCH!

SPRING 2019

Pain: *Permitting to feel
inevitable emotions*

Hope hurts: *But it's your
best option*

Differences: *Identifying
similarities*

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NQ18 OUCH: Where are you (or your org) in pain? *By Jarrod Shappell*

Whoever said “pain is inevitable, suffering is not” has never had sciatica.

Sciatica, or what I call Back Lightning, is caused by the pinching of the sciatic nerve in your spine. But rather than stopping there, the Back Lightning sends its current from your lower back, through your hip, and down into a part of your knee you didn’t know you had. For the last two months I have tried everything — ice, heat, stretching, medicine, medicine that is legal in my state but not yours — to treat my Back Lightning. Nothing has worked.

So I’ve done the only logical thing left to do, I’m ignoring the pain and powering through.

Of course my wife has alerted me that this is not the only logical thing to do. There are doctors, physical therapists, chiropractors, and other professional service providers that may be able to help me. I honestly hadn’t considered that. When we are in pain, asking for help from qualified experts is so often our choice of last resort. But there are times when it should be the first.

This episode of physical pain, and my automatic response, has had me reflecting on what I and others do in response to the inevitable OUCHes of life.



As you can sense by now (if you've read any of our work before), we aren't merely talking about physical pain. We feel (and inflict) pain in a variety of ways through our leadership and in our organizations. There is pain in the functional "joints" of our organization (just ask Sales and Marketing). There is pain when there is misalignment between a person's contributions and their requirements of their role. (What did you talk about in your last performance review?) There is pain when a leader positions their personal gain over stakeholder value (Yeah, that boss). And perhaps nothing will make your organization scream ouch more loudly than when there is a gap between the needs of your customer and what the business is providing them. As the saying goes, organizational pain is inevitable.

Organizational Ouches can occur between colleagues, within or across teams, and deep within our own souls. They may vary by the size or growth of our company. But what is true is that all leaders, teams, and organizations will have an ouch — it's an inevitable part of growing as a company and leader. And similarly to our growth


from child to adult, we cannot entirely avoid pain and injury. And nor should we. Leaders who pretend as if the pain does not exist or who work tirelessly to keep their organization away from the pain associated with growth, do their organization a disservice. As we now understand, coddling children, physically or psychologically, does further damage to them. Children need to experience these ouches — physical hurts, disappointments, frustrations, fears — in order to believe in what they are capable of as well as to develop resilience. The same is true for you and your organization.

There is pain when there is misalignment between a person's contributions and their requirements of their role.

So if the ouch is inevitable, it is our response to the pain that ensures that we minimize the suffering for us and those we lead. If we can become more aware of how we make others say ouch and how we respond to the ouches in our lives, we will indeed be able to limit the suffering we inflict and incur.

Do we have the vulnerability to admit when we make a poor strategic decision that is causing pain to our organization? Do we accept the symptoms of slow execution without blaming but spending time diagnosing the root causes? When we are in over our heads handling team conflict, do we have the humility to invite a professional in to help? When we are angry or disappointed in our colleagues, our boss, or our direct reports, do we find the right voice to express that pain, or “make them pay” with our simmering silence or snarky insults? Fr. Richard Rohr, renowned theologian and philosopher, says, “If we do not transform our pain, we will inevitably transmit it...to those closest to us.” Your ouches can be some of your organization’s (and life’s) greatest teachers. To be sure, those lessons don’t always feel pleasant. Lessons that invite pain are not like fine wine — they don’t get better with age. They grow more toxic, risk more destruction, and damage careers and opportunities.

Where is your “ouch” today? What ouches are you causing? And who around you cares enough to tell you? Are there ouches in your organization you have the power to relieve for others? And what would happen if you did?

This NQ18 is to help you react to your organizational pains, so that we can thoughtfully respond to pain in a way that leads to greater resilience and health. But as far as I know, none of this will do anything to heal Back Lightning. I may need a doctor for that. 



OUCH



The Art of Apology

By Eric Hansen

In this era of 24-hour media and impulsive Twitter wars we are witnessing the rapid dissipation of long-standing societal norms of basic decency and civil interaction. Vitriol and malignant verbiage run through our technology feeds and spew onto the public consciousness as regularly as Old Faithful. And, like the Romans of old, many of us are becoming desensitized to the emotional carnage caused to our fellow humans on a scale no longer confined to the Colosseum. And, even on those rare occasions where guilt and misinformation are acknowledged, few, if any, offer sincere regret and retraction.

While we can't singlehandedly stem the tide of shifting norms, we can influence it by our individual choices within our spheres of influence. This is an empowering reminder, because even though we are part of a vast, closely interconnected world, we still spend most of our time in smaller neighborhoods, work and faith communities, and families where accountability for behavior and its impact on others absolutely makes a difference to the quality of our lives and environment.

**An apology is a basic
but effective tool to
repair a breach of trust.**

Unfortunately, even within smaller confines and despite our best intentions, we will still violate other people's expectations, break promises or commitments, and act deceptively. Wittingly or otherwise, each of us will hurt others on occasion. And each time we become aware of such a situation we have a choice to make: To repair and strengthen the relationship so that it becomes a blessing to us, or allow it to fester, becoming a bane and burden that we will carry forward.

An apology is a basic but effective tool to repair a breach of trust. Most of us were taught early that apologies are fundamental to our social well-being: Children are still taught to say "Sorry" even before they are able to speak a full sentence. In fact, I recently watched as my daughter coaxed my granddaughter to sign "I'm sorry" even before she can speak at all! Disappointingly, far too many do not progress much beyond those rudimentary words, as witnessed by apologies made by adults that are often as emotionally flat and unconvincing as those made by children.

If you are caught up in
our current cultural decline,
fiercely racing others to the bottom
of civility, courageously stop.
Remember what you were taught
as a kid. Sincerely saying "Sorry"
certainly still matters.

Apologizing is an essential skill for reconciling and strengthening relationships. Sincere apologies are impactful precisely because a verbal expression verifies that the offender understands that their actions damaged trust and requires reparation. While verbal acknowledgement is a necessary first step, it is also insufficient. The weightier question concerns what more is required to effectively apologize. A recent study highlighted the most critical components of an effective apology: 1) an acknowledgment of responsibility, 2) an explanation of what went wrong, 3) an expression of regret, 4) an offer to repair, 5) a declaration of repentance or commitment to not repeat the offense, and 6) a request for forgiveness. And while including more elements is better, some carry greater weight. Acknowledgement of responsibility and an offer to repair or restore what was damaged or taken were considered the most important components, while a request for forgiveness was considered the least important.

Becoming aware that you've offended or hurt someone can be awkward and emotionally challenging. A normal reaction is to defend yourself and explain your way out of it. We feel justified using the "they shouldn't have been offended because ..." tactic because most of us don't often intentionally hurt others. That we are not bad people rings true but misses the point. When you find yourself needing to apologize, consider the following:

Recognize and evaluate your actions:

First, check your pride. Then assess and recognize the offense for what it is. Was it intentional? Is it a misunderstanding? Listen to your gut — it's often a reliable indicator of what is real. Regret and remorse of conscience is to our emotional well-being what pain is to our physical preservation — a warning and a protection from additional damage. These feelings are an acknowledgement that you had some part in hurting someone. Recognizing these feelings is actually positive because they reveal self-awareness that your behaviors are not in line with your value system. Allow them to be the motivating force to take the next positive steps to correct the situation.

Acknowledge and own your actions to those you've offended: _____

This may seem simple but it's often difficult because the person is hurt, not talking to and even avoiding you. Don't press your timeline on them — this isn't for your benefit. Give them time to work through their emotion and gain composure before approaching them or they will have difficulty hearing what you have to say.

Apologize in person and in private. If this isn't possible then a phone call is the next best thing. Explain, but do not excuse your behavior. Most importantly, own the choices you made and acknowledge the impact of your actions on them. Ask for their forgiveness; then shut up and listen to what they say. You'll want them to quickly forgive you but be patient. This is their opportunity to express their hurt. The most impactful action you can take is to listen with empathy and manage defensiveness. Give them time to really air it out.

You may consider writing a follow-up letter as a way to reinforce the importance of the relationship, your desire for forgiveness, and to give them a point of reference that may help them work through any residual feelings.


Repair and restore: _____

Depending on the offense, it may not be possible to make things completely right, but your obligation is to do everything within your power to repair the damage you've caused. Ask them how you can make things right. Your actions should be commensurate to redress the breach of trust and any collateral damage. A forgotten dinner appointment may be as easy as an offer to treat them on a newly rescheduled date. Reputational damage is harder to restore but still possible, with effort. Whatever can be done to repair and restore the integrity of the other person and your relationship is the expectation, nothing more or less.

Learn and move forward: _____

See and use the experience as a tutor. Mistakes are a fact of life. Everyone makes them, but they don't have to become tragedies. "Success in life isn't the absence of failure but going from failure to failure without any loss of enthusiasm." Prioritize the present. While you can't rewrite history, you can ensure history doesn't repeat itself.

Forgive yourself and quiet your inner critic — that nagging voice that reminds you that you messed up. Journaling and listing your positive qualities can help redirect those negative thoughts. Writing is also an effective way to clarify your goals — what you want differently for the future, who you want to become, and how you hope to move forward. Let out your feelings of remorse about the situation and those you hurt. Talk with trusted others about the experience. Get perspective from someone who isn't emotionally invested and use their dispassionate point of view to think through ways you will make future interactions with associates, family, and others better.

If you are caught up in our current cultural decline, fiercely racing others to the bottom of civility, courageously stop. Remember what you were taught as a kid. Sincerely saying "Sorry" certainly still matters. You won't arrest the coarseness of civil discourse alone, but you will improve your own life and make a positive difference in the quality of lives of those around you. Who doesn't want that? 

Forgive yourself and quiet your inner critic — that nagging voice that reminds you that you messed up.

Optimizing Your Business Means Optimizing Your Relationships

By Josh Epperson



Businesses win when they create novel or unique value. And businesses create that type of value when they optimize the relationships between the leaders responsible for creating it.

Ever had your success stalled by a siloed work environment? Ever wished you could harness conflict to aid creativity and innovation? Ever failed to instill the collective accountability of your team toward a common aim? Ever agreed on a decision and found out later your interpretation of it was much different than that of the others?

Organizations invest millions annually to solve these challenges, often with solutions that are only surface deep, so the challenges remain. These superficial solutions fall into one of three types: Digital, Environmental, or Financial.

- Digital Solutions promise to streamline information sharing and aid virtual teams who are required to work together effectively.
- Environmental Solutions promise to remove the physical barriers that keep leaders from getting face time with each other.
- Financial Solutions promise to incent leaders to work together.

However, these digital, environmental, and financial solutions fail to address the working relationships that create the value between them. They bring everyone's information closer together more quickly but they fail to help leaders understand why they believe information hoarding or withholding is necessary in the first place.

Toppling office walls increases geographic proximity but fails to address the reason for avoidance in the first place. Pay-for-performance compensation puts financial teeth to collaboration but fails to instill a norm that teaming is profitable even when individuals do not financially benefit.

These solutions are worthwhile endeavors if they are paired with the deeper work required to strengthen the partnerships between the leaders involved. For instance, Healthcare research of Accountable Care Organizations shows that financial incentives only work when paired with training team members to team effectively. Furthermore, this McKinsey study shows that relational incentives are less used and more effective than financial incentives.

Addressing the root of ineffectiveness between you and others requires attention in the following areas.

Prioritize the “how” of your working relationships. Too often the “what” of work trumps how it is accomplished. Both are required for success. If you do great work and kill each other in the process, you’ll lose in the long run. Prioritizing the “how” requires a give and take by each leader – ultimately the “how” must accomplish the work in a way that is accepted by all. Get under the surface by identifying the similarities and differences of each leader’s preferred way to work together.

- What do you believe about information and how will you share it?
- What do you believe about feedback and how will you give and receive it?
- What do you believe about development and how will your work incorporate it?
- What do you believe about trust and how will you extend and build it?

Find something that matters to everyone. You won’t move forward together if you only focus on your differences; they’re important but only tell a divided story. The sooner you can surface a common story, the sooner you will begin to gain traction as a collective. If you’re struggling to find something that matters to everyone, reflect on your experiences across three-time horizons.


- **Past** – What was the impetus for my involvement today? What are the experiences that brought me into this room, meeting, work? How did my history prepare me, serve as a catalyst, or compel my involvement?
- **Present** – What do you want to give and get from the time spent together? How do you envision participating? What do you believe about the others who are present? How does that impact how you will or will not participate?
- **Future** – What hopes, aspirations, or beliefs do you hold that will make this meaningful over the long haul? Do you have a specific goal or objective you’re working toward? What stories do you want to tell about this work and the group’s involvement in creating it?

Individually reflect on your time horizons. As a group look across your reflections and name the commonalities you notice.

Let those insights be the common ground on which you collectively stand and work from – those patterns are the epicenter of your collective value creation. A word of caution – when differences run deep aligning on something is more important than aligning on the thing. Eventually you must get to “the” thing but aligning on something pulls individuals out of isolation, helps build necessary relationships, and creates movement in a common direction even if it doesn’t immediately create the outcome you’re initially fighting over.

Flip the script and normalize a new way. The longer you have worked with someone, the deeper behavioral patterns are ingrained. Over time norms create scripts or patterns of behavior that are enacted unconsciously. Some of the following scenarios may feel familiar. Each includes a suggestion for how to flip the script of the working relationship between you.

- Is your function at odds with another function? Do you spend a portion of your team meetings complaining how they’re not doing what you need them to do? Flip the script. Tell your Marketing team you’ve invited Sales to your next meeting and asked them to share how Marketing makes their life difficult.
- Are your leaders conflict avoidant? Do they skirt difficult topics and lead unilaterally so they don’t have to confront others? Flip the script. At your next team meeting spend the entire time debating avoided topics and making decisions you know will speed results.
- Are your expectations falling on deaf ears? Has HR told you to institute a 90-day PIP? Flip the script. Instead of imposing more expectations on your leader, give them a framework (I need you to accomplish X by Y) and have them detail accountabilities and metrics in their PIP.
- Has decision-making created churn and confusion rather than direction and action? Do you spend time after making a decision convincing others of the outcome or changing plans because you’re heading in the wrong direction? Flip the script. Appoint a note taker for every meeting. Have them capture decisions, conversation and debate, and outcomes with actions and accountabilities. Distribute the notes after the meeting.

Prioritizing how you work, surfacing commonalities, and actively working to flip the script between those involved will get you well on your way to doing the deeper, more reliable work required for thriving workplace relationships and the value they create. Then you can be confident the investment in the digital, environmental, and financial solutions will be worth the resource and live up to their promised results. 

You won’t move forward together if you only focus on your differences; they’re important but only tell a divided story. The sooner you can surface a common story, the sooner you will begin to gain traction as a collective.



6 Steps to Harness Workplace Emotions for Good

By Ashley Morris

We envy our peer's promotion. We are overcome with relief after a successful project launch or presentation. We rage when we are ignored in a meeting. Though many of us wish it wasn't so, our emotions don't turn off when we enter our workplace. During our 40+ hours in the workplace each week, employees and leaders are filled with spontaneous feelings and at times their origins are complicated.

The good news is that recent literature places a big emphasis on creating "speak up cultures" in our workplace. More and more companies are adopting ideas like Radical Candor and Crucial Conversations. That means these spontaneous emotions ("WHY DID THE NEW GUY GET THE BETTER PARKING SPOT?!") are now more likely to make their way to the desk of leaders.

What these really practical approaches don't account for is the balance that's required between emotions and productivity. You certainly can't have everyone upset all the time because then nothing gets done. And of course you don't want to create an environment where people aren't able to express their feelings and process them. So how does a leader create conditions that promote productivity while permitting us to feel our inevitable emotions?

It Starts with You

In order to offer a safe place for people to be vulnerable, you must be comfortable with your own emotions and be able to regulate your own feelings first. This means not ignoring them or burying them, but instead recognizing and acknowledging them. Why? Because emotions are data and “denial of our emotions isn’t the only danger we face when we rely too heavily on our left brain.” Listening to your own emotions – reflecting, journaling, meditating, emotional first aid, talking to a psychotherapist – can provide data on what makes you tick. These are all practical ways to help you get clear on your own tapes and triggers that may set you off into an emotional tailspin. Once you have a plan for how to recognize and keep your own emotions in check, then you can focus your attention on creating the environment where your team can express their feelings and frustrations so that performance doesn’t tank.

Create a Safe Space

Because we know our emotions aren’t left outside the office’s front door, it’s important for people to know where to go and when to express their feelings and frustrations. Employees often fear expressing their emotions because of how they might be perceived. In my experience, they fear they’ll get fired if they disclose too much, so they hold back. Reduce the threat for your team members by inviting, encouraging, and even rewarding folks for speaking up and sharing how they feel.

Remain Curious and Open

If an employee or team member comes to you to express their feelings, refrain from trying to “help” or “solve” their problem (unless it’s a legitimate issue or risk to the business). Managers are conditioned to be in “help mode,” especially when times are busy and work needs to get done. They often try to solve problems to keep things moving forward. First, recognize that. Then, don’t do it. Instead be an ear, listen, ask questions, and remain open. Most times when people are upset, they just want to be heard and let off steam, so let them.

Ensure that Relationships are Strong

If relationships are strained or non-existent between you and your direct reports (or even your peers) it’s likely they won’t view you as a safe place to express themselves. To bridge those relationships, engage more often and ask questions. Asking helps to build relationships. As relationships begin to form, trust grows between you and your team and this starts to create the Psychological Safety needed for people to speak up and share their feelings without worrying that someone will undermine them or use what they heard against them.


**During our 40+ hours
in the workplace each week,
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Consider the Organization Impediments

The organization has different ways it pushes on vulnerability and may even prevent people from expressing themselves. Is the organization virtual? With globalization and virtual teams popping up everywhere, many researchers are looking at how to create conditions for teams in the digital age. Is your company scaling and growing at a fast rate, and hiring a lot of new people? Are there institutional stories that get shared at the water cooler – “she’s always so moody!” or “he complains about how busy he is all the time” – that tell a story of what happens to people who do express emotions? Norms and conditions in your organization must be present for employees to feel safe, share their emotions, and speak up.

Are You Causing the Emotions

Probably the hardest thing to consider — especially if you’re intentionally trying everything to ensure your team has what they need to do their jobs and feel like they belong — is to consider that maybe you contribute to the emotions. Are your demands on results and performance realistic? Does everything need to be the highest quality and done the fastest all the time? The harder question to consider is if it’s not about performance, is it about personality? Is your management style causing bad feelings and frustrations? Does your team avoid talking to you because you are always too busy? Pause to ask yourself these questions. Better still ask someone who comes to you with their feelings. That shows great humility and will make it easier for people to come to you in the future.

As much as we may try and push them down or ignore them, feelings aren’t going anywhere. So as leaders, we must not only create space for feelings and emotions at work, but also learn to harness them. By creating space for employees, you’ll invite a diverse sets of thoughts and ideas and likely make better business decisions. And as we have come to see in the last few years, no longer are reason and facts good enough, but emotions are needed to balance and provide insight for the whole picture. I invite you to think about how you can create conditions in your role, team, and company for people to express their emotions. Who knows? Maybe as a result we’ll get less mad about the parking spots we missed out on and gain more feelings of pride, excitement, and hope for our company’s future. 



Hope Hurts But It's Our Best Option

By Ron Carucci



After an entire quarter reflecting on the many ways we feel “ouch” in our organizations, we thought we’d offer up one of the most important antidotes to organizational “owweees.” While cynicism, apathy, or bitterness may entice us, especially after a season of protracted ouches, we’d suggest a more courageous choice: reaching for hope.

We’ve never had an executive call us and say, “Can you help our organization build some hope?” We have, however, met many executives who should have called for that. One of the most profound resources of an organization is this unspoken energy. The presence of hope is hard to describe but if you’ve seen an organization that has lost hope, you know just how bleak it can be. So what is hope and how can we get it?

Hope is created at the intersections of:

- 1 **passion** – a desire for something greater,
- 2 **perseverance** – the need to prevail against great odds, and
- 3 **faith** – the belief that there could be something greater beyond those odds. When a leader, organization, or even country is facing its darkest days (which we all eventually encounter) hope is what gets us through.

Hope is not allegorical or “squishy.” Researchers Peterson and Byron point out that individuals with a higher capacity for hope are more goal-oriented and motivated to achieve their goals than those with low hope. They found that regardless of whether they were talking about sales employees, mortgage brokers, or management executives, high-hope individuals had higher overall job performance. They also found that higher hope executives produced more and better quality solutions, suggesting that hopefulness may help employees when they encounter obstacles at work.

Yes, hope is dangerous and risky. But if we are ever going to have organizations and communities with fewer ouches in them, it will take all the hope we can muster to get there.

We’ve all encountered life’s obstacles and not responded hopefully. Does that mean we don’t have capacity for hope? Hope is a fundamental choice. Hope would not be the powerful force that it is if it were chosen only when a reason to do so was obvious.

The true power of hope lies in choosing it when the presenting data suggests doing otherwise — when ouches have piled up and chronic pain feels like the “new normal” for the organization.

Hope requires a leap of faith. It asks us to place our confidence behind an endeavor without necessarily having tangible evidence to back it up — especially the hope for needed change. Hope isn’t something that just appears. It must be relentlessly pursued. Its most powerful expression comes in the face of staunch opposition. Too many of us confuse hope with mere wishing, but behind the greatest achievements in all human endeavor we find profound degrees of hope from individuals and communities choosing it when facing unthinkable challenges.

So which organizational ouches sting the most for you? Which drain you of hope? Knowing the answer to these questions will help with the inevitable cost-benefit analysis we all do in our minds when deciding whether or not to choose hope. And we conduct that analysis because we all know the inherent danger in hope. Choosing it risks even greater pain should things not pan out as hoped. Dashed hope may hurt even more than the ouch requiring hope in the first place.

A client of mine recently experienced a horrific ouch at her company — the betrayal of her confidence by a trusted colleague. It sent her reeling. Angry and vengeful, she vowed to never trust people on her team again, and began to shut down and withdraw from them. I said to her, “It hurts to lose a relationship with a valued colleague, but does that mean you can’t ever trust anyone?” She said, “I can see now the risk is too great — lost trust hurts more than I knew.”

I replied, “I know you’re hurt now, so pulling away feels like a great way to prevent getting hurt again. But if you’re honest, you know the isolation you’ll eventually feel will also hurt.”

Bitterly, she said, “Pick your poison. Hoping for trust again and not getting it would hurt more.”


I asked her to consider that the rest of her team felt sad about the distance she kept. Two in her inner circle knew the origin of her pain, and resented being lumped in with the colleague who betrayed her. “While you may not hope for trust again, what should they do with the trust they still have in you and with the connection they still want to enjoy that you are withholding from them?” She could feel the tension between missing her colleagues and not wanting to hurt them, and wanting to make everyone pay for the misstep of one.

Hope was her best option.

My client’s predicament illustrates the painful intersection of “ouch” and “hope.” The moments we least want to choose hope are the ones we most need to.

Hope gives way to compassion, forgiveness, and gratitude. Staying stuck in “ouch” — regardless of where the ouch came from — makes us bitter, selfish, and spiteful.

To be sure, most organizational ouches feel unjust, cruel, and worthy of outrage. I’m not suggesting we turn a blind eye to inexcusable behavior or systemic harm. But I am asking us to consider the unintended consequences of choosing not to believe change is possible.

Yes, hope is dangerous and risky. But if we are ever going to have organizations and communities with fewer ouches in them, it will take all the hope we can muster to get there. 

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