

## **STRATEGIES TO WORK EFFECTIVELY WITH SHARKS**

Developed by Nate Terrell, LCSW and Anita Foeman, Ph.D.

- 1) Recognize that sharks can not “make” you angry, fearful, etc. You create these reactions as a result of your thoughts and beliefs. You increase the power and control sharks have over you by allowing them to “push your buttons.”
- 2) Maintain your own sense of internal balance and focus even while sharks are trying to control or intimidate you. Sharks are often energized when they encounter fear, anxiety, etc. in others.
- 3) When you decide to confront a shark, practice carefully ahead of time through role play or visualization. Do not allow yourself to be derailed by her/his reaction to what you are saying. State your case as directly, calmly and rationally as possible. You lose credibility by overstating what you have to say.
- 4) Sidestep or deflect power struggles or head-to-head battles with sharks by “taking your sail out of the wind,” refusing to react to their provocative behavior and using Socratic questioning to explore the reasons behind or actual merit of their position.
- 5) Induce the cooperation of sharks by getting them to side with you against the problem.
- 6) Do not personalize shark behavior. It is likely they treat others the same way they treat you.
- 7) Set and maintain viable limits so that sharks do not take advantage of you.
- 8) Use meta-communicative questions to create cognitive dissonance and force sharks to confront their attitudes or behavior.
- 9) Since sharks often have deep scars from childhood and/or a biochemical imbalance, they sometimes are appropriate for a referral to Employee Assistance Programs or mental health services.
- 10) Mobilize a group of employees to meet together with a shark to tell him/her how they are impacted by his/her behavior and what, if any, consequences will result if he/she does not change.
- 11) Because of their deep fear of failure, sharks are sometimes motivated to learn dolphin leadership skills even if they do not understand the principles on which they are based. They respond best to a concrete teaching approach and opportunities to practice the skills they are learning.
- 12) Sharks love to use organizational rules and regulations to justify their actions. Therefore, it may be necessary to change the rules or “raise the bar” concerning what is expected to force them to change their behaviors, attitudes, etc.

13) Since it is often dangerous and/or exhausting to take on a shark alone, strategize and collaborate with others, whenever possible.

14) Although the bluster, threats, etc. of sharks can be intimidating, their power often melts away when they encounter the persistence, strength of conviction, savvy and courage of a group of dolphins who have shark experience (some dolphins even welcome a shark or two swimming about to keep them on their toes and give them an opportunity to hone their skills.)

15) When negotiating with sharks, make sure you have a viable BATNA (best alternative to a negotiated agreement.) This “walkaway” point gives you important leverage and protects you from being intimidated into giving away more than you really want.

16) Rather than spend their energy battling sharks, master dolphins often create change at such a rapid pace that sharks are left obsolete, longing for the days when their bite increased rather than decreased their power.