

“MASKS OF THE WORKPLACE”



Leslie Rose McDonald
President, Pathfinders CTS, Inc.

With Halloween approaching in the coming days, we think of all the costumes and masks that will be worn by the goblins who visit our homes seeking treats.

At work we wear masks, too, except we wear them all year long. They are masks that make us look good, get us promoted, and earn us more money, status or power. Masks in the workplace sometimes hide our undesirable selves, or sadder, our desirable selves. These many “masks” are transparent to the wearer, but usually very evident to those who work with them. Here are just a few of the many masks that we can “see” in the workplace:

The “It has to be “Perfect” mask. This mask is worn by people who have a strong need to control the outcome. They feel that everything they do, and everything that their co-workers or direct reports do, must be done perfectly (“my way”). They set standards for themselves and those around them that are not just high, they are unrealistic. This mask is worn when people don’t trust that others are capable and competent. Related to the “micro-management” mask.

The “I’m Better Than You” mask. This mask, like many others, reflects the reverse of what the wearer really feels about him or herself inside. Some people do not have a strong sense of self and, therefore, need to act superior or control others in order to boost their own self-esteem. People who wear this mask feel most comfortable, or protected, when they can make themselves feel good at another’s expense.

The “I Am Exempt from Walking the Talk” mask. This is worn by the person who says one thing and acts otherwise. Those who wear this mask lack the personal congruency to follow through with their stated intentions. For instance, a manager who says that he or she has an “open door” policy, may literally provide an open door to their office much of the time. However, their mind or ability to truly listen to others and consider their ideas, opinions or feelings is a “door” shut tight.

The “I’m Only Here For Myself” mask. This mask is worn by people who take actions or make decisions that they rationalize are in the best interests of the company or the employees, when the prime motivator and benefit is really for one’s own career advancement or financial gain.

The “I Must Win at All Costs” mask. This mask presents itself as an overly aggressive, win/lose stance. People with this mask cannot see win-win possibilities, and so are more vulnerable to compromising values or ethics while expecting others to do so as well, in order to achieve the goal. This is a very dangerous mask, and needs to be discerned by others so that damage to the larger whole, and the people in it, can be minimized.

How can we get these masks to come off? The most profound way is for the wearer of the mask to have an experience from their behavior that is so painful that they are jolted into looking into themselves and getting help to create a plan for removing that mask in their life.

We all wear some kind of masks in the workplace. Are you ready to look at yours? Consider looking into the mirror today and asking yourself what masks might you be wearing that others see so readily. Then consider the brave step of taking it off for just one day to see how it feels - perhaps on Halloween. Maybe it won’t be as scary as you think.

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