Overview

This workshop is based on the book, Working with You Is Killing Me, by Katherine Crowley and Kathi Elster.

Workshop Purpose

The workshop focuses on the importance of interpersonal relationships with your co-workers and how to mitigate destructive patterns they sometimes fall into.

Workshop Objectives

This workshop will help you:

1. Recognize the symptoms of a negative workplace relationship.
2. Recognize the role each of us plays in these situations.
3. Learn how to set boundaries and control your reactions to co-workers who cross those boundaries.
4. Learn how to "unhook" yourself from difficult interpersonal situations at work.

Activity 1: Debrief the Video

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sam and Kelly</th>
<th>Sam exceeded Kelly’s offer of use of her office.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Molly and Sofia</td>
<td>Molly had personal issues and used Sofia to listen.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ray and Victor</td>
<td>Ray gives Victor a chance, but Victor doesn’t seem happy in the job.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

What did you see in the video? Who did what to whom? Identify the following people from the video:

**Confining Roles**: An unconscious way WE act that can typecast us.
Who played a Confining Role?

**Boundary Busters**: The things people do that intrude on our space.
Who was a Boundary Buster?

**Toxic Relationships**: The way OTHERS act that gets us hooked.
Who was in a Toxic Relationship?

4 Unhooking Steps:

1. Unhook Physically
2. Unhook Mentally
3. Unhook Verbally
4. Unhook with a Business Tool
Activity 2: Confining Roles

In each section, check off those statements that apply to your work situation. Then, write the number of checkmarks in each section in the left margin.

1. Are you generally the first one to arrive at work and the last one to leave?  
   - Have you given up or canceled your vacation because of work?  
   - Do you insist on doing business during off-hours?  
   - Are you constantly asked to solve problems that aren’t in your job description?  
   - Do you have a problem saying no whenever someone asks you to take on another responsibility?

2. Do you consider yourself an independent thinker?  
   - Do you enjoy shocking your co-workers with provocative statements?  
   - In a group situation, do you often take a contrary point of view?  
   - Does getting into a heated argument energize you?  
   - Do you frequently clash with people in positions of authority?

3. Are you someone who naturally mediates conflicts between others?  
   - Are you able to find a common point of view between two differing perspectives?  
   - Does the thought of upsetting your co-workers make you anxious?  
   - Do you have a hard time understanding why anyone would want to pick a fight?  
   - Do you have difficulty advocating your point of view at meetings?

4. Do you prefer to stay out of the limelight?  
   - Do you keep your ideas and opinions to yourself?  
   - Do you take pride in doing your work and “staying out of the way”?  
   - At meetings, do you tend to sit back and observe?  
   - Do you feel that your accomplishments are often ignored or disregarded?

5. Are you someone who naturally finds out about your colleagues’ private lives?  
   - Do co-workers always divulge their personal problems to you?  
   - Do you make excuses for people at work based on your knowledge of their personal issues?  
   - Do you lower your expectations and compensate for under-functioning employees?  
   - Do you often feel responsible for solving other people’s personal problems at work?

6. Is your workload bigger than anybody else’s?  
   - Do you find yourself rushing in to “save the day” on a regular basis?  
   - Do you secretly feel jealous when a co-worker receives positive attention?  
   - Do you feel underappreciated for all that you do?  
   - Do you feel overburdened, overwhelmed, and physically exhausted most of the time?

7. Is your first impulse in any situation to find the humor?  
   - Do you have a knack for making people laugh?  
   - Do you take pride in charming and amusing your co-workers?  
   - Does interpersonal conflict make you uncomfortable?  
   - Do you sometimes wish people took you more seriously?
## Activity 3: Boundary Busters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boundary</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping their word</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing emotion</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manners and courtesy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others?</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
## Activity 4: Toxic Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toxic Type</th>
<th>Examples</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empty Pit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chip on the Shoulder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saboteur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestal Smasher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Notes:
Activity 5: Unhook Physically

How we can unhook physically:

- Deep breathing
- Take a walk
- Step outside and enjoy the weather
- Splash cold water on your face
- Count to ten
- Jog, power walk, do yoga before/after work or on lunch break

Other ways?
Activity 6: Unhook Mentally

Directions: Review the case study and answer the questions as if you were Ellen.
(If you are working on a personal situation, answer the questions to
unhook from that situation instead.)

Case Study: Unhook from a Toxic Relationship (The Saboteur)

Ellen is a senior food inspector for the Department of Health. Due to cutbacks in state funding, she had
been short-staffed for months and had a backlog of restaurants that needed to be assessed and either
certified or shut down. Don was assigned to help, and Ellen immediately noticed that he was both
ergetic and ambitious. He quickly brought himself up-to-date on the regulations, constantly
complimented Ellen on her professionalism, and tried to imitate her meticulous methods during
inspections. With his friendly personality and penchant for detail, Don seemed like the perfect solution.

Two months later, however, she overheard Don chatting with their mutual supervisor, Mr. Sutherland.
“I want to give Ellen the benefit of the doubt,” he confided, “but honestly, I’ve watched her make a lot
of mistakes.” Ellen knew that her inspections had been by-the-book and up to standard every time she’d
been with Don, and she couldn’t understand why Don was saying these things. Over the next few
weeks, she noticed Don spending more and more time in Mr. Sutherland’s office and, coincidentally,
Mr. Sutherland was becoming increasingly critical of Ellen’s performance.

How can Ellen unhook from her Saboteur?

What’s happening?

What are the facts?

What is the other person’s (Don’s) part in the situation?

What is my (Ellen’s) part?

What is the result I want?

What are my options? | What are the consequences of each option
and/or how will my action affect others?

<p>| | | | |</p>
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
<th></th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity 7: Verbal Unhooking Techniques

Write sample statements for unhooking from the following situations.

Unhooking from Boundary Busters

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Boundary Buster</th>
<th>Unhooking Phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Time</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal space</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Keeping their word</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Personal information</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Expressing emotions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manners and courtesy</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Noise</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Unhooking from Toxic Relationships

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Toxic Type</th>
<th>Unhooking Phrase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Empty Pit</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Chip on the Shoulder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Exploder</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Saboteur</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Pedestal Smasher</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Activity 8: Unhook Verbally - Practice

Unhook from a Boundary Buster

Hank and Brock both work in the customer service division of a major telephone company. They sit in workstations separated by cushioned dividers that are supposed to absorb some of the sound. In Brock's case, however, nothing absorbs his bellowing voice.

To Hank, Brock literally seems to yell when he speaks with customers. Often, he stands up while talking, which makes his voice carry like a megaphone. In addition to his thunderous voice, his sneeze sounds like a foghorn. When he laughs, Hank's cubicle vibrates.

When Brock is in the office, Hank can barely hear his own conversations with customers. He is often forced to ask them to repeat themselves. He has difficulty concentrating on anything other than the sound of his boisterous co-worker. At the end of nearly every day, Hank leaves work with a headache.

How can Hank unhook from this situation?

Directions: Review the case study and write some language for Hank to use.

(If you are working on a personal situation, write some language to unhook from that work situation instead.)

Practice using this language with your partner.

Use language that is direct but non-confrontational to describe the situation that needs to be resolved. The type of phrase you use depends on the situation you are unhooking from, but you should always try to frame your conversation with an "I Statement".

Language that can be used to unhook

After you've practiced verbally unhooking: Discuss the interaction with your partner. What worked well? What was uncomfortable? Do they have any suggestions for improving your verbal unhooking?

Notes:
Activity 9: Unhook with a Business Tool

Identify the business tools you could use to defuse your situation.

**Business Tools for Employees:**
- Memos, email, letters – written documentation of work expectations, deadlines, etc., and reiteration of something you’ve agreed to
- Employee goals or other performance benchmarks – draw on this information to monitor your own success and to know how you’ll be evaluated
- Meeting agendas – to control boundary busters
- Others?

**Business Tools for Supervisors:**
- Job descriptions – to be sure everyone is on the same page
- Policies and procedures – these documents back you up
- Performance reviews – set expectations
- Disciplinary action forms – when previous efforts don’t work
- Memos, email, letters – written documentation
- 360-degree reviews – you may be surprised to learn that you are the problem
- Others?

What business tools could Ellen and/or Hank have used? Or, what business tools could you have used in your “hooked” situation?
Workshop Summary

This workshop has provided you with tools to change uncomfortable, unhealthy work relationships. You now know how to:

- **Unhook yourself from difficult interpersonal situations at work** – the four steps to unhooking from a situation are:
  1. Unhook physically
  2. Unhook mentally
  3. Unhook verbally
  4. Unhook with a business tool

- **Recognize the symptoms of a toxic workplace relationship** – the people who drain you emotionally and have a negative impact on your life. The four unhooking steps can be applied to any of these relationships.

- **Set boundaries and control your reactions to co-workers who cross them** – using the four-step process to regain control of your space and your emotions.

- You also now know how to recognize the **confining role** you may be playing that is attracting these toxic relationships to you.
Activity 2: Unhooking from Confining Roles

Identify the role you tend to take on in the workplace by counting the checkmarks in each section on Workbook page 3. Sections with three or more check marks are roles you tend to play in the workplace. Review the definitions and unhooking suggestions for the roles you tend to fall into.

1 - Hero: Superhuman of the workplace; high-energy and can-do attitude. The need to be idolized compels the hero to produce more and perform better than everyone else. Never being able to say no can hook them into an overload situation and put their health and home life in danger.

1. Don’t take on additional responsibilities that are not part of your job description.
2. Leave work at a reasonable hour.
3. Take at least one vacation a year.
4. Don’t take work home.
5. Don’t take on work that would compromise numbers 1-4.

2 - Rebel: Bends the rules, goes against the grain... even if it jeopardizes their career. These are the independent thinkers who are most successful in leadership positions. They are hooked when bending the rules alienates them or they become branded as troublemakers.

1. Practice impulse control; think before you speak.
2. When sending a written document, find someone to serve as your editor.
3. Before expressing a contrary point of view, think about whether others really want to hear it.
4. When authorities make decisions you dislike, take a moment to think before you speak.
5. When you think you’ve offended someone, say you’re sorry.

3 - Peacemaker: Diplomats of the workforce who do whatever it takes to keep the peace. They avoid confrontations and are well liked in the organization. They become hooked when the role prevents them from voicing their true opinions or taking a stand. They become paralyzed from the fear of not being liked.

1. Practice saying NO.
2. State what you want, even if you think others won’t like you for it.
3. When conflicts arise that don’t involve you, avoid jumping in to mediate.
4. Express your point of view as clearly as you can, without hedging.
5. When a co-worker is upset at work, don’t try to fix it.
4 - Invisible One: Stays out of trouble by staying out of the spotlight. They keep their heads down and their lips sealed, and seem invisible at meetings or other types of office gatherings. They become hooked when their accomplishments and ideas go unnoticed.

1. Be seen – attend meetings, conferences, etc.
2. Be willing to state your ideas and opinions to co-workers.
3. Speak up. At meetings, be sure to speak up at least once.
4. Report your accomplishments to co-workers and supervisors.
5. Ask for raises and promotions. Don’t wait for them to be handed to you.

5 - Caretaker: Feels responsible for and tries to solve everyone else’s problems. They are the counselors of the workplace with a gift for listening and making others feel comfortable and safe. They enjoy helping solve other people’s problems, but they become hooked when they make excuses or decisions for someone based on their personal knowledge of the co-worker’s personal situation.

1. Keep conversations with co-workers about their personal lives to a minimum.
2. Ask co-workers not to confide the personal details of their lives to you.
3. Stop making excuses for others based on their personal issues.
4. Stick with your job description – don’t become an unpaid therapist.
5. Instead of shouldering others’ problems, start worrying about their performance.

6 - Martyr: Wants recognition and praise for sacrifice and suffering on behalf of the organization. They are the reliable, extremely busy co-workers willing to sacrifice their time and energy for the sake of the organization. They become hooked when their desire to be recognized for their sacrifices turns to resentment.

1. Reduce your workload. Don’t take on extra projects or special favors.
2. Delegate tasks to others and give them credit for a job well done.
3. Leave work at the office – the organization will survive without you.
5. Limit the number of hours you work on weekends or other days off.

7 - Entertainer: Uses jokes and humor to break the tension and keep others happy. They see humor in most situations, including difficult office meetings, and help keep tension under control. They become hooked when their ideas or opinions become marginalized because of their reputation as an entertainer.

1. Set ambitious but realistic goals for your career and focus on reaching them.
2. In tense moments when you want to insert a joke, practice doing nothing.
3. If you want something, ask for it directly without apologizing or making a joke.
4. Set limits with people whose behavior angers you.
5. Trade popularity for respect.
Your Unhooking Planner

Select a situation in your workplace that has you hooked. Use this form to unhook.

1. Describe the overall situation
   - Who is involved and what keeps happening?

2. List the symptoms you're exhibiting that indicate you're hooked

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Physical</td>
<td>How is your body reacting? Where is the discomfort?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Emotional</td>
<td>What uncomfortable feelings are you experiencing?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mental</td>
<td>What thoughts are invading your day-to-day activities?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

3. Unhook

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Physically</th>
<th>List the actions you can take to release energy and calm down your body.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mentally</td>
<td>Take a mental inventory of your situation:</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What's happening here?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What are the facts of the situation?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What's his or her part?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What's my part?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>- What are my options?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Verbally</td>
<td>What can you say that will resolve the problem rather than perpetuate it?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Remember, &quot;I feel... when... because... so, I'd like...&quot;</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Using a Business Tool</td>
<td>What business tools can depersonalize this challenging situation and provide ways to document events and measure performance?</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Copy this form and repeat this process whenever you get hooked!
Resources


