

TWO LEADERSHIP CONCEPTS IN BRIEF

Dr. Helen Eckmann

www.JamesLConsulting.com

Self-Serving Attribution Bias (SSAB)

This concept is where we judge others more harshly for exhibiting behaviors that we exhibit. In other words, when we drive too fast we think we “are good drivers” or are “in a hurry” but when someone else drives too fast we think they are wreckless. Another example from business: When we have to “stretch the truth” in order to make a deadline we think we are justified, when someone else exhibits the same behavior we think they are a “liar.”

Fundamental Attribution Bias (FAE)

This concept is where we blame a person for a system failure. This means that we would prefer to blame people rather than the organizations or constructs in which the problem occurred. Two examples:

1. We walk into the dentist office and the dentist is running late and we become impatient with the receptionist. (The receptionist is not the reason the dentist is running late, there could be a ton of reasons, overbooking, a patient had an emergency, dentist got sick or even took a long lunch with her girlfriends). But the poor receptionist probably didn't have anything to do with the dentist running late.
2. We work in an organization and they change the employee insurance policy and the employees need to contribute more to their own coverage. We walk into the HR Director and give him “a piece of our mind.” If we think about this more deeply we have to realize that the HR Director did not make this decision on his own – upper management probably decided to do this (and yelling at him isn't going to change anything).

Analysis

When we practice either SSAB or FAE we are not getting to the “root” of the problem. We are not fixing anything and we are not exercising leadership (we are just blaming). In order to solve problems and exercise leadership we have to get to the causes of what is going on.

