



The Nasty Little “Amiga”

July 2009
Volume 8 Issue 5



William E. Caswell

Bill Caswell is an experienced coach of CEOs and senior executives and the author of *The Respect Revolution*, a 12-book series written by a CEO for CEOs as a guide to getting companies to *Excellence*



The Respect Revolution

This 12-volume book series guides a business to *Excellence* and keeps it there.

Get your copy now, available at your local bookstore or at www.respectrevolution.com

Do you have topic ideas? Comments or questions?

Contact **Upkar Bilkhu**
CCCC
190 Bronson Ave. Suite 201
Ottawa, ON K1R 6H4
Tel: (613) 233-0700
Email:
ubilkhu@caswellccc.com

www.caswellccc.com

What stands between you and success is a pair of little glands we can refer to as “Amiga”, which comes from its root “amyg” (pronounced amig) or more specifically the amygdala. All you need is way to recognize and control the “Amiga” to be as great a success in your business as you may dream.

Unfortunately it is never quite so easy. It is like saying that the only thing standing between you and losing 25 pounds is control of your mouth. Yet as simple as that statement is, we all know the challenge of losing weight. YET HAVE NO DOUBT AS TO THE IMPORTANCE OF THE AMIGA – CONTROL THAT AND YOU WILL CONTROL YOUR FUTURE.

The Amiga is our emotional control centre. Here are some quick facts:

- It consists of 2 glands in our brain (called the amygdala)
- It operates up to 100 times faster than our logic processor¹
- It triggers more than 50 physiological changes in our bodies (including white blood cell increases)
- It dominates the logical thinking (One hour later we wonder: “Why didn’t I say something smarter?”)
- Its effect is inescapable
- Our seemingly irrational reactions are perfectly normal (but not helpful)

While we accept that it is difficult to control our emotional reaction in the face of even a simple threat – a wrong word, inappropriate body language, loss of a privilege – we can accept that it is easier for us to be logical or less emotional

regarding someone else’s problem or perceived threat. Therein lies one key.

Imagine a normal dialog between you and your boss Janet with some issue at hand, and as it progresses, a tiny (or large) threat may be tossed in. “You’re pretty good AI, but I don’t think you’re as capable of this task as Harry; I’m going to pass it to him.” What we usually do is to respond to this primordial threat by offering a defensive comment, in this case, words such as: “Harry! He’s incompetent! I can do three times as much as Harry!” Added to your comments might be body language and tone of voice all driven by your physiological changes of: sweat on the hands, rise in adrenalin, dilated eyeballs, (and 47 other changes). Now Janet is human too and she senses a threat from you and her Amiga kicks in to defend her territory (her decision in this case). Yet, she shows professional restraint: “No, I don’t think so AI. Harry completed the Ace project on time and on budget last week.” At that you have no choice (driven by your Amigas) but to respond: “Only because I made sure he met the project goals; I was coaching that idiot every step of the way.” Janet

¹ The amygdala are primordial glands to save us in an emergency, reacting quickly so we can choose to fight or flight, and not delay a decision that could end our survival. The logic processor would have us contemplate, to weigh the pros and cons; but too much contemplation would have the sabre-toothed tiger at our throats.



must defend: "That's not how I see it, AI." Now, onto you: "That SOB! I can't believe it." Janet the boss, at this point, adds: "AI, you're losing your cool. I don't like you making negative comments about other staff members here. Let's leave this. My decision is final. Harry will take the project!" At that you depart her office in a huff and Janet is not happy with you. Both of you are upset.

The issue was that Janet was choosing to assign this new task to your associate Harry. By the end of the discussion, nothing you said would allow Janet to change her mind. Instead she dug her heels in, just so you would know who was boss. If the logical choice was to keep you on the job instead of Harry, Janet did not see that option from your conversation.

Here is the second key. You cannot control Janet's emotions, but you can control your own. To do so, first you have to recognize when the Amigas have clicked in. Second you have to quit feeding the Amigas because your Amiga and Janet's (or any other protagonist) feed off each other. **YOU MUST GET YOU BOTH OFF THE EMOTIONAL PATH AND ONTO THE LOGICAL ONE.** Only you can do that. The other person usually cannot.

How? Recognize that other people become emotional and thus **YOU MUST NOT CONTRIBUTE TO THEIR EMOTIONAL NEEDS.** Therefore suck in the insult thrown at you and speak in a way that defuses the other person's emotions. 'Sucking in' means sacrificing your own emotional state for the moment, for the sake of getting to a logical solution. With emotions dominating, there rarely is space for logic. Its 100:1 odds (of speed of amygdala processor over logic processor) are worse than the odds at any casino.

Here is an example of a corrective dialog, adjusting for your Amiga's mischief as well as Janet's reaction:

"You're pretty good AI, but I don't think you're as capable of this

task as Harry; I'm going to pass it to him." You respond: "Can you tell me the advantages you see of assigning this to Harry?" Now, besides your passive comments, your body language and tone of voice are non-threatening to Janet. (Yes, I know inside you are still steaming because you are human and your Amiga is trying to save you from the sabre-toothed tiger called Janet.) She says: "Harry completed the Ace project on time and on budget last week." You add: "I hope you are aware that I was coaching Harry every step of the way to make sure he met the project goals. Perhaps you can check that with him." Janet speaks: "No I wasn't aware of that at all. Let me check with Harry and get back to you." At this point Janet is not unhappy with you. Neither of you are upset and you are working towards a logical resolution of the situation.

Advice: I try to pass on the idea that you must imagine that the other party is a little baby who has just vomited on you. The baby has no idea the inconvenience caused you. When we deal with a baby we do not respond in a threatening way. We simply clean up the mess and move to the next step without retaliating. View Janet as if she were throwing up on you and has no idea of the inconvenience caused you. Clean up the mess and move onto the next step without retaliating.

When you master the Amigas you will master arriving at a logical conclusion for every issue before you treated in this manner. If you cave in to your emotions, you will rarely arrive at practical solutions. The more problems you solve (the right way) the more successful you will be in business. It is that simple².

Good luck.

Bill Caswell

² Over 700 'impossible' client problems solved this way is our testament.