



Dr Gary McClain, a licensed psychotherapist and relationship coach and author, *The Power of Closure: Why we want it, how to get it, and when to walk away*, writes about myths related to working in an organisation.

**MYTH
BUSTER**

Falling into the love trap at work

In my role as a mental health professional and relationship coach, often working in a corporate environment, I speak with individuals from hourly wage jobs to entry-level professionals to seasoned executives. They talk with me about issues that commonly arise in the work environment, such as toxic bosses and co-workers, lack of promotional opportunities, frustration with changes that are being thrust upon them, and other issues. And during these conversations, a question often emerges: “Can’t I get an explanation? An apology? A promise? Can’t I get closure?” Before I have a conversation with them around how to find closure in their situation, I first speak with them about why they need closure as well as whether it is even realistic in their situation to expect closure.

Having said that, the following are five myths related to working in an organisation that often emerge in our discussions.

MYTH 1: I love my company, and my company loves me.

Allow me to quote Sigmund Freud, the father of psychoanalysis. Freud said, “Love and work

are the cornerstones of humanness.” Work is transactional in nature. You come to work, you perform the tasks laid out for you and contribute to the goals of the organisation, and you are paid for your time. Your organisation can be a great place to work, with a comfortable environment, interesting and challenging work, a friendly and supportive boss, and other team members. All good. But at the end of the day, it is still a place to work. It is still a job.

Love, on the other hand, is much more nuanced. We love our partners, children, parents, friends. And love can be rewarding, heartbreaking, frustrating. Nonetheless, humans are wired to seek love.

Here is where things get complicated. Because of the human need for love, we are constantly seeking ways to have what I call our ‘love-button’ pushed. We feel good about our organisations, our bosses, and co-workers. We love our organisation, so doesn’t our organisation love us back? Keep in mind that love comes with expectations for the object of our love.

Your company may value your contribution, but it doesn’t love you.

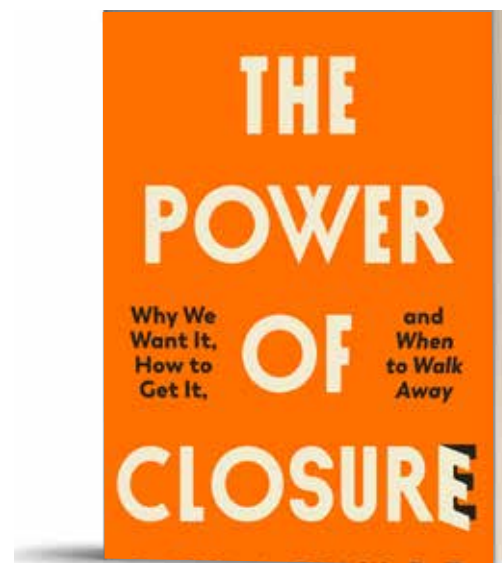
Organisations make hard decisions. Why? Because they are operating in a competitive environment and have to adjust to the demands of the market, or because they are mobilising for a new opportunity, or the regulatory environment has changed. Sure, decisions affect people.

MYTH 2: My company owes me an explanation.

My clients in the corporate world often complain and lament about occurrences that have happened for which they feel they are owed an explanation. A reorganisation has occurred and they feel they should have been given more warning and/or more details on decisions that impact them personally. They were passed over for a promotion and they feel their leadership has not adequately explained to them why they were not chosen. Or, harder yet, an employee has been part of a lay-off and feels their boss owes them an explanation. Yes, the need for closure. “I thought they loved me here. How could they make this decision?” This

expectation can leave you stuck when it may be time to move on.

Organisations make hard decisions. Why? Because they are operating in a competitive environment and have to adjust to the



demands of the market, or because they are mobilising for a new opportunity, or the regulatory environment has changed. Sure, decisions affect people. However, communication is often regulated in the corporate environment. Your closure may be limited to official communication and not the personalised words you may desire and feel entitled to.



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Acceptance, and the willingness to walk away from the demand for closure, are strengths.

MYTH 3: My boss will take care of me.

I hear this often from clients. For me, this is a signal that they are turning their boss into a parent, expecting their boss to take care of them, to protect them, as their parents did, or hoping their boss will step in and give them the nurturing their parents did not give them. Either way, viewing your boss as a parental figure opens the door to disappointment and frustration.

A good boss provides guidance, mentorship, clear directions, and support. Some bosses are better at this than others. But associating these qualities with being cared for — and loved — is a set-up for disappointment. As an employee, your job is to help your boss to be successful. When your boss achieves success, you may be

acknowledged for your contribution. Or not. As I said, some bosses are better leaders than others.

Here is a healthier perspective: Your boss is another professional who is at a higher level in the organisation and therefore oversees your work. This isn't love, it isn't family. It's your job.

MYTH 4: My co-workers and I are one big happy family.

When my clients make this statement, an alarm goes off in my mind. It is often followed by declarations of love: "I just love my team members." Sure, it is only human to form connections with the people we work with. And hopefully to enjoy the work we do together. Positive relationships at work are validating and can help set you up for success in your organisation. But is it love?



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At the end of the day, work is a transaction. You bring your skills to the organisation. The organisation pays you for your time and skills. That's the beginning and the end of what you deserve, as harsh as this may sound.

As I said, it is human nature to bring our childhood family dynamics into the workplace with us. As our minds turn our leaders into parent figures, it is also human to turn co-workers into representations of our siblings. Have you noticed co-workers trying to take credit for their co-worker's contributions? Playing the victim when they don't get what they think they deserve? Jumping in to be the peacemaker and caregiver? These behaviours often have their roots in family dysfunctionality experienced as children.

Your co-workers may be great to work with. And your performance review may include a rating for teamwork. That's all good. But they are not your family. And you do not have to be the person you were in your family as a child. Collegiality and teamwork are important, as is making sure your individual

contribution is recognised by your leaders. You are not at work to find family. Have reasonable expectations for your co-workers and save yourself a lot of stress and heartache.

MYTH 5: I am always going to get what I deserve.

How often does a client say to me: "I deserved..." When I talk to them about their jobs, I hear this often.

Again, at the end of the day, work is a transaction. You bring your skills to the organisation. The organisation pays you for your time and skills. That's the beginning and the end of what you deserve, as harsh as this may sound. Sure, providing a comfortable environment, a salary commensurate with your background and skills, policies that promote teamwork and positive interaction... all help to make the workday go more smoothly, and even with a measure of emotional satisfaction. All provided to support your productivity.

Work is a social contract. Organisations are responsible to investors and other stakeholders. You are there to support this goal. It's that simple.

So back to closure. When employees do not get what they think they deserved, such as a bonus, recognition, a raise, a promotion ... they demand closure in the form of an explanation, if not an apology and a promise of future rewards. When employees are laid off from their jobs, they also demand an explanation of why they were asked to leave.

One more time. Work is a transaction. We don't always know why leaders make decisions. And your perception of what is deserved, or not deserved, is just that. Your perception. That is often hard to sit with.

Remember: Realistic expectations are a key to contentment.

Our careers are important to us. And yes, many of us love our work. I certainly do. However, the transactional nature of work means that the organisation in which you choose to apply your skills is

in a transactional relationship with you. When you declare love, you may also create unreasonable expectations. Protect me. Nurture me. Give me what I ask for. Organisations are in existence to achieve their mission. It's your role to contribute to that mission. Again, this is a transaction. Despite the good feelings and creature comforts that make us think we have found love; work is not love. The endorphin rush of love creates expectations, often unrealistic, of what we should be receiving in return.

Your workplace is not love. It is not family. The social contract: you do the work, you get paid. Consequently, any closure you may be expecting or demanding in the form of reward, explanations, apologies, may not be realistic, and may only lead to frustration, lack of motivation, anger. Some days, closure means shrugging your shoulders, accepting that life doesn't always go the way we want it to, and choosing to do the best you can in the days ahead. That's the liberation of acceptance. And a healthy perspective. **M**

