Either/Or Thinking

Looks like:

- Things are either/or: good/bad, right/wrong, with us/against us. There is reduced capacity for recognizing multiple or **co-existing truths** and complexity. Lots of sentences start with "but."

- Closely linked to perfectionism. Perfectionists tend to aspire to a **singular view or end goal**, which makes it difficult to learn from mistakes, take feedback, and deal productively with those who do not agree.

- Weakens an individual's or organization's ability to deal with complexity. The resulting analysis is usually **superficial and not holistic** (e.g., believing that poverty is simply the result of a lack of education).

- Creates conflict and increases a sense of urgency. People feel they have to make decisions to do either this or that, with no time or encouragement to **consider alternatives**, particularly those requiring more time or resources.

- Often used by those with a clear agenda or goal to push those who are still thinking or reflecting to make a choice between 'a' or 'b' instead of acknowledging a need **to come up with more options**.

Antidotes:

- Notice when people use 'either/or' language and replace it with 'both/and' language.

- When you feel stuck in an either/or situation, push to come up with more than two alternatives. If you feel you are stuck between two bad decisions and can't see a way out, try telling your team: "I believe there is a third solution. What we need to do is figure out what it is."

Either/Or Thinking (cont.)

- Notice when people are oversimplifying complex issues, particularly when the stakes seem high or an urgent decision needs to be made. Slow it down and encourage people to do a deeper analysis.

- When people are faced with an urgent decision, take a pause and give people some breathing room to think creatively. When possible, avoid making decisions under extreme pressure.

- Equip your team with the tools to think in more complex and nuanced ways (e.g., mind maps, relationship maps, and other forms of systems mapping).

Remember both can be true!!

Do it how you can and not how you can't!!