

CHALLENGING CONVERSATIONS

MANAGING AND HOLDING YOUR PEOPLE ACCOUNTABLE

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ONE OF THE MOST CHALLENGING ASPECTS OF EFFECTIVE LEADERSHIP

is to set expectations for and then hold your people accountable for getting work done. Many leaders have difficulty setting clear expectations for their employees and then have an even harder time making certain that their team's performance meets expectations.

While most companies set their strategic and operational goals out during their annual planning process, how these get communicated to key managers can vary from leader to leader. Some will "cascade" them down to their direct reports, expecting them to continue that process on down to managers and front-line workers. Others will set their expectations for the entire business unit and then spell out those objectives to the leaders to drill down to their team members.

Many leaders assume that setting these global objectives is all that it takes to make them happen. The expectation is that their direct reports should be able to carry on with the required actions and can mobilize their troops to implement the activities.

Unfortunately, the reality is far from the truth. According to a 2012 McKinsey study of more than 5,400 IT projects, more than 50 percent of them came in well over budget, with one of six having such high cost overruns that they threatened to put the company out of business.

Why the Difficulty?

Most leaders will tell you that they view their role as one of helping their employees to be successful. They want to clear the path, provide the resources and then get out of the way so that their staff blossoms. Yet when the performance of their team members falls short, they often have a difficult time telling them the honest truth, which may be that they and the project fell short for a variety of known and unknown reasons. It is difficult to bring bad news to the forefront, and most leaders are not particularly skilled at talking about bad things. Everyone's preference is to focus on what is working and to not get people upset or mad. This often leads, however, to the leader avoiding talking about the issue when it is small and manageable, and then when the problem becomes large and unmanageable, frustrations and tempers flare.

Creating Accountability

When we talk with employees about how they can improve their performance and reach their goals, they universally say that they want to be successful and want their leaders to hold them accountable for getting the work done. They usually report that they don't feel as if their leaders have a consistent approach towards managing the goals and objectives that the organization has set for the year. As we've worked with leaders in these situations, we've identified five steps that every leader can take to ensure that their team members

are successful and that the goals of the organization are achieved. These include:

1

Start with the businesses strategy and tie performance expectations to the strategy. We find that you cannot remind the team enough about the strategic objectives of the enterprise. People's perspectives get myopic as they dive more and more into the weeds, and pulling them back to a view that is high, wide and long-term helps them remember what everyone is working to achieve.

2

Set clear objectives, along with measures that detail how you know you are achieving your goals, along with a tracking system that honestly describes progress. We've seen way too many red and yellow dashboard reports that get glossed over with the comments that "we are working on that."

3

Establish regular check-in times that provide an opportunity to review progress. As the leader you want your questions to focus on "what is helping you be successful?" and "what are the impediments to the success of this project?"

4

Create a reward structure that provides an upside for success and a downside for failure. People do fine if they know and understand the rules and expectations that are being put in place and what the consequences are for their efforts.

5

Make it a community effort by creating a public forum to share progress. People are motivated to change if they see others who are successful and want to follow in their footsteps.

Effectively holding people accountable for their work is not an easy process, as many leaders already know. However, the opportunity for success is significantly heightened by establishing a systematic approach that translates into specific action steps you take as a leader and that your team expects. Leaders who follow this approach create a foundation of trust and respect. The result for the organization is a culture where people own their commitments and act with the greater good in mind.

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