

Leadership Instalments

Insist on Best Effort

By Dan Gaynor

EVERY SKILLED AND CARING LEADER MUST LEARN how to deal with poor performance. It's just a reality that some people perform poorly from time to time. Even successful employees can slip into poor work habits now and then. When they do they let the team and themselves down. While most leaders know they should do something about these situations many avoid dealing with them, I think because they worry about the discomfort they will cause, or that which they themselves will feel.

Here we discover a leadership paradox - we think that by avoiding discomfort we are more caring, when embracing it for the right reasons can be among the most caring things a leader does. You are caring when you do something about poor performance the moment it becomes apparent. Caring leaders don't let people form habits that are going to cause them problems sooner or later. This is why you should insist on best effort from every person you lead. When people start cutting corners you are acting in their best interest by saying something about it.

When I coach leaders on the value of best effort it's an easy sell. I can see them readily acknowledge that getting the best from everyone is something they and their teams would benefit from. Best effort carries with it obvious performance benefits. But from the employee's perspective best effort should be seen as much as an obligation to self as it is to the leader or the team.

Giving one's very best is the surest way to lasting success and job satisfaction. It's a good habit. Over almost twenty years leading a great many people I observed a consistent reality. All the most satisfied, most contented and most successful people were also the most diligent and hard working. All the grumpiest and most discontented people were those with the poorest work habits.

I believe we are all hard-wired to be productive. When we are not, we begin to feel less self worth. The extreme end of this dynamic is demonstrated in the feelings the unemployed describe. I believe working people feel the same way as their work habits begin to decline - say laziness or sloppiness - regardless of whether or not the boss says anything about it. Left unchecked habits often worsen and bigger problems arise. But hard work doesn't just lead to feelings of achievement and self worth it also underpins security. People feel more secure in their relationships with their leaders and their companies when



they are doing their best work. The people who put in a good day every day (and by this I do not mean long hours but rather quality work) go home feeling satisfied with their contribution and much more secure in their futures. They are not worried about losing their jobs in a cutback. Their contributions are noticed and appreciated. As valued employees, they have strong relationships with their leaders.

So when you notice declining work habits and do something about it rather than turning a blind eye, you are serving the team the mission and the individual involved. You are setting people up for lasting success and security. And when you catch it early all you usually have to do is notice and say something about it. The individual discovers that you are paying attention and picks the work back up. It's usually an easy correction when you catch it early. Insist on best effort, and help others understand that it is a good habit to form for a good reason, and you'll ensure high performance high job satisfaction.

Discussion Questions:

1. Have you observed the same connection between effort and job satisfaction in the people you work with?
2. What do you think holds leaders back from discussing performance problems as early as they should?
3. Are there people you are leading today who have slipped into poor work habits? When will you speak to them about it?

For information on a workshop or personal coaching to help you lead your team through this storm contact us for an appointment.

For other Leadership Instalments articles go to:
www.gaynorconsulting.com

Dan Gaynor can be contacted at:
tel 403.880.1780
email dan@gaynorconsulting.com