

Communication Techniques: Reminders for Supervisors

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How would you prepare yourself to stay focused while addressing the following unique situations during a performance discussion meeting with an employee?

John tries very hard but just can't seem to catch on to the new computer system. The system will eventually become an intricate part of his job. He's attended the same course twice but still doesn't get it. You've run out of ways to help.

Jane has been dealing with a personal problem for the past month. She's been distant with you and her co-workers. Her performance has recently slipped and she has missed two important deadlines.

One way is to use a "Discussion Planner." It prompts you to consider the following points:

- **What is the purpose of this discussion?**
- **What results do you want to achieve with this discussion?**
- **What kind of "I-Statement" will help you put the issue on the table?** ("I-Statements" clearly tell someone exactly what you need to discuss or resolve. The key components of the statement are: "I feel," "when you," "because." For example: "*Jane, I feel concerned when you are not able to complete your assignments on time because it causes delays for other employees who are relying on you for information.*")
- **How do you expect the other person to respond?**
- **What will you say and do to stay direct, respectful, on purpose, and share in the responsibility when this discussion happens?**

Of course there are usually no easy answers to these situations. However, let's say that you and John (or you and Jane) do arrive at a couple of solutions. And, later on, after the discussion, you notice John or Jane using one or more of the solutions you mutually agreed on. At this point, your follow up and recognition of any achievement will be critical.

Ferdinand Fournies, author of *Why Employees Don't Do What They're Supposed To Do And What To Do About It*, discusses these situations and offers the following advice:

- Fournies explains, "You must deliver 'rewards' for the performance you expect. Use verbal rewards describing specific performance as soon as possible after performance occurs to maintain the desired performance. To be able to do that, you must get out from behind your desk and look for achievements. Since most of the people working for you do at least 90 percent of the things they are supposed to be doing, it should be easy to catch them doing something right. Here are some examples:

- 'I noticed you put in some extra time last night to complete this report on time; I really appreciate your effort.'
- 'Thank you for limiting your discussion to the agenda material in today's staff meeting as I asked you to do. Your cooperation helped the meeting go faster.'
- 'Thank you for your suggestion for improving the process; that is the kind of teamwork that will help us

succeed. I will get back to you as soon as we evaluate your suggestion.'

- 'I want to compliment you on your persistence. I notice that you are continuing to practice on the computer. Keep up your effort and you will eventually succeed.'
- 'Another job well done -- you certainly work hard to keep us on schedule; keep up the good work.'

It just stands to reason that if you take the time to ask employees to improve their performance, you must also take the time to check for improvement and verbally compliment any improvement."

Another important idea – **empowerment** – contains the key concept that effective leaders don't empower people; they create and nurture the conditions whereby individual potential can be maximized.

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