COACHING TIP
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PRINCIPLES FOR CONFRONTING PROBLEM BEHAVIOR

Most minor behavior problems can be corrected by simply addressing them in a gentle, straight-forward manner. This can often be done in a relaxed, casual setting. The better your relationship with the team member, the easier it will be to get an improvement in behavior. However, if the problem persists and is having a negative impact on your team and productivity, you will need to let the employee know that some sort of resolution is imperative. This usually requires a more formal setting.

When the problem behavior warrants a formal meeting and you have the facts, the best time to act is as soon as possible. Waiting will not make the situation better and it probably won't go away. Follow these steps in getting prepared for your discussion:

1. Get the facts. Do not rely on rumor or innuendo.
2. Know enough about the person to predict his or her responses.
3. Write bullet points about what you will say and in what order.
4. Choose an appropriate location that is private.

Do not use E-mail when dealing with problem behavior. You will lose the effectiveness of tone, inflection, facial expression, and body language; plus, your message or intent might be misinterpreted without the advantage of a dialogue. Try to deal with the issue face to face. If that isn't practical, do it by phone.

The severity of the problem might dictate the time needed, but in most cases be direct and keep it brief. Describe your expectations for acceptable behavior in specific terms. Do not "sugar coat" or "beat around the bush." Get agreement or acknowledgement that the team member understands your expectations. Get the team member to tell you, in his or her own words, what your expectations are. A nod or passive approval is not enough when you are dealing with a serious problem. Get agreement that their current behavior is not meeting expectations and is unacceptable.

Avoid showing anger. It is okay to show or express disappointment; or, to explain the gravity of the situation with intensity; but, getting angry will create unnecessary tension that could shut down communication and cause resistance to change.

When challenged, the best strategy is to avoid over-reacting. Listen carefully. A good listener will usually make the other person more receptive to changing and taking corrective action. Avoid offering your personal opinion; keep the discussion business-based. When there are multiple issues, focus on one at a time to prevent overwhelming or confusing the team member.

Get the team member to set a goal to correct the problem behavior. Set a follow-up date to review progress on the goal.

Document the conversation. This will make it easier to follow up and reduce the possibility that something was misconstrued.

The costs of not confronting problem behavior are significant. The direct costs include increased labor, waste, rework, lost sales, poor customer relations, and damage to your reputation, to name a few. Also, team members who have appropriate behavior might feel resentful and lose respect for your leadership.

At the same time, the costs of replacing an employee can be substantial. The direct costs could include ad cost, placement fees, personnel testing, costs related to interviewing, and training costs. Other, harder to measure, costs could include: the cost of mistakes or errors, customer dissatisfaction or loss of confidence, and low team morale.

The Bottom Line – fixing an existing problem by confronting problem behavior is usually less expensive than recruiting, hiring, and training a replacement.