



Bridges A monthly eZine from Meridian Consulting, Inc.

Building Bridges to Success -- September 2003

In this issue:

- Spotlight on Conflict: *The Cost of Conflict*
 - Coaches Corner: *Ten Tips for Giving Effective Instructions and Feedback*
-

Thought for the month: We received this quote from a friend and former client in New Mexico and would like to share it with you, "*If we did all the things we are capable of, we would literally astound ourselves.*" Thomas Edison

Coaches Corner: *Ten Tips for Giving Effective Instructions and Feedback*

Managing others is a difficult job and requires good communication skills. Learning to give good instructions and feedback will make the job easier. After reading the examples, rate yourself and determine if there is anything you can do differently.

Giving Instructions:

- 1. Phrasing Instructions as Questions.** This implies that your subordinates have a choice when none exists.
 - **Wrong:** Can you please finish this report?
 - **Right:** Please finish this report by 4 P.M. today.
- 2. Phrasing Expectations in the Abstract, Rather than Concrete Terms.** Using such words as *responsible, accountable, or effective, etc.*, leaves the manager's meaning open to interpretation. Be specific regarding the behavior and the deliverables you want to see.
 - **Wrong:** I want you to be responsible for that project.
 - **Right:** I want you to ensure the project is finished by the date we discussed, that you stay within the budget, and that all of the deliverables meet the expectations listed on the project plan that we discussed at our previous meeting.
- 3. Preceding the Instructions with the Word "Let's."** When you expect the employee to complete the task without your assistance, say so. Do not be "passive" in your language use. Otherwise, it leads to confusion as to who should be starting and completing the task, and it implies that you will assist with the task/project.

- **Wrong:** Let's get this report finished.
 - **Right:** I want you to complete the report by the end of business today.
4. **Follow Instructions with Long Explanations.** Putting the "explanation" last attracts the employee's attention to it, rather than to the "instruction" itself.
- **Wrong:** I want you to focus on the tasks I gave you this morning. It's important that you arrange your day to complete these tasks, since it's critical to get the work done in a timely manner. Especially since we received all those new action items at the last meeting.
 - **Right:** I want you to rearrange the priorities of your work today and focus on completing these tasks by the end of business today.
5. **Making an Instruction into a Sales Pitch.** When a manager feels they have to resort to cheerleading, it implies the task must be a real stinker, or that they are uncomfortable in assigning the task for some reason. Either way, it focuses the employee on the wrong thing.
- **Wrong:** We really want you to meet the projections set for your department. By meeting the projections you and your team will really look good to the executive team. I know that you have the skills and experience to successfully complete this.
 - **Right:** You need to meet the projections that were set for your department. If you think that your department will have trouble meeting them, then you can brainstorm a list of options, and we will discuss which ones are the best way for you to meet your goals.
6. **Giving Instructions with an Open-ended Timeframe.** By not giving the task some boundaries, you put the task and your employee at risk for failure. By not setting a time, it implies that it can be done anytime, during the day, week, or never. If you don't set a time boundary (start & stop), the employee may wait until the last minute to start the report, and then "emergent events" may preclude getting the task completed. If it's important to get done, set a time boundary.
- **Wrong:** I need you to finish that report this week.
 - **Right:** I want that report finished and on my desk by 5 P.M. Thursday.
7. **Giving Instructions Without Setting a "Follow Up" Time to Ensure the Task Was Completed.** Instructions can be given, but if the manager fails to follow-up and ensure the instructions were followed, then the employee (rightly) understands that the instructions don't always have to be followed. In fact, some employees think (wrongly) that the task must not have been too important if the manager forgets to ask whether it got done.
- **Wrong:** Please get that report finished by the close of business on Friday.
 - **Right:** I expect this project to be done by the close of business Friday. Please send me an e-mail when it has been completed.

Giving Feedback

8. **Expressing Feedback in the Form of Wishes.** This amounts to nothing more than a passive complaint about the employee's behavior. The wording is not specific with regards to exactly what behavior is expected.

- **Wrong:** When you interact with customers, I wish you would be more helpful.
- **Right:** I need to talk to you about the service you are giving to our customers. I observed you helping customers at the counter several times. Not once did you greet them or smile at them, nor did you offer to help them, without their having to ask you. From this day forward, I expect you to greet people in a friendly and courteous way, with a smile, and always ask them if you can be of assistance. I will review your progress at our next scheduled status meeting.

9. Expressing Feedback as an Exasperated Question. This amounts to nothing more than a rhetorical question about the employee's behavior.

- **Wrong:** How many times have I asked you to get your reports in on time? What am I supposed to do about this?
- **Right:** Your report was not handed in by the time we agreed upon. This has created a delay in producing the report and has given us all a black eye.

10. Expressing Feedback as a Threat. Threats are inappropriate behavior for anyone to use, regardless of the provocation. In addition, this amounts to nothing more than a rhetorical statement about the event.

- **Wrong:** I swear, I don't know how I'm going to get you to come to work on time, short of writing you up or firing you.
- **Right:** I expect you to arrive at work by 8 A.M. It is your job to make sure you arrive on time. I will make a note of your arrival time on a daily basis. From this time forward, I will make a note in your personnel file every time you are tardy. As you know, excessive tardiness is grounds for dismissal.

Spotlight on Conflict: *The Cost of Conflict*

The cost associated with conflict situations increases the longer the situation goes unresolved and has the potential for escalating and expanding. In 2002, the National Center for Health Statistics estimated the annual cost of violence and stress-induced hostility in the workplace was over "\$13.5 billion in medical costs and caused 1.75 million days of lost work." In extreme cases, an employee may take their grievances outside the company and the associated costs begin to increase dramatically.

Everyday, at every level of the organization, unresolved conflict increases the cost of doing business, reduces productivity, and places enormous stress on important business relationships. In fact, experts estimate that at least 33% of a typical supervisors time is spent coping with conflict situations.

Meridian presents a powerful and insightful workshop, entitled ***Conflict at Work: The Cause, The Cost, and The Cure***. This dynamic and interactive two-day program examines underlying conflict issues, helps participants understand what is at risk, and provides practical tools and techniques that will not only resolve conflict issues, but will build constructive relationships. *Contact us today, for more details.*

We invite you to visit our website at www.meridianconsultinginc.com

~~~~~

**The Small Print:** Copyright © Meridian Consulting, Inc., 2003. All Rights reserved. Please feel free to print this eZine, we only ask that you give Meridian credit for the content when you share it.

If at any time, you would like your name removed from our monthly eZine, simply send an e-mail to [info@meridianconsultinginc.com](mailto:info@meridianconsultinginc.com) with the word “unsubscribe” in the message box. Your address will never be sold, bartered, traded, or in any other way shared with any other person.