

JUICY WORK NEWS

Updates from The Learning Advantage

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THE Learning Advantage



Mobley's Musings: Addicted to Drama

Have you ever noticed that some people seem surrounded by a constant swirl of drama – much like the Peanuts cartoon character Pigpen and his cloud of dirt? Are they just unlucky or do they do something to attract the swirl? And what's the best way to avoid getting caught up in it?

Some people, it seems to me, are drawn to drama. They engage in office gossip, read intrigue into simple conversations and even make stuff up. Perhaps they're bored at work and like to stir things up just for fun. One way to dilute their impact is to focus on the positive. For example, when a coworker asks, "What do you think about the organizational changes?" and his scowl makes it clear what he thinks of it, don't take the bait. Respond with a comment that shuts down the drama. "Every change brings opportunity," you might say, adding, "I'm looking forward to what might come from the change." In this way, you aren't adding fuel to the drama fire.

Other people create drama by reading ulterior motives into every innocent comment or interaction. When a colleague told Darla Drama he was too busy to go to lunch with her, she concluded he thought he was more important than her and that she doesn't have enough to do. Miffed, Darla made a snippy remark, leaving her colleague puzzled. To nip this drama in the bud, the colleague could acknowledge that Darla seems upset and ask her what is going on. This gives Darla the opportunity to relinquish her conspiracy theory and close the issue.

The best ways to dial down drama are to ignore it or address it constructively. Under no circumstances should you feed it.

Sandy



Sandy Mobley

Ask Sandy

Giving feedback to poor performer

Several clients hold end-of-year performance conversations in January. Some struggle with how direct to be when giving feedback to someone who is underperforming. They don't want to crush their spirit but they want to make sure the message is received.

No one likes to tell people they aren't hitting the mark or that while they're performing fine at the current level they aren't promotable. But not telling them robs them of the impetus to improve, recognize they aren't in the right job or stop chasing something they can't achieve. And just as

with positive feedback, the more factual you can be in giving negative feedback, the better.

Carey gets the job done about 80 percent of the time and his results are usually of good quality. But because he's inconsistent, his manager can't depend on him. When Carey gets feedback about this issue it seems to fall on deaf ears. But is it Carey's hearing or his manager's words that are faulty? Carey's position isn't easy to replace, so I asked his manager if he was not being direct enough with Carey. Is he willing to put up with an 80-percent Carey rather than finding and training a replacement? The manager admitted that his feedback may have been too subtle at first because he didn't want Carey to quit. But his frustration has grown and the manager has vowed to make his feedback clear and specific.

I find several things helpful in ensuring poor performers get the message:

- * In addition to saying what isn't working, identify what you expect.
- * When verbal conversations don't seem to make an impact, put your feedback in writing.
- * Ask people to summarize what they're taking away from the conversation and what next steps they will take to improve performance.
- * Make sure they know the consequences of poor performance.

The more factual and specific the feedback, the better the employee can hear it. Telling an employee "you're lazy" is hurtful and doesn't clarify expectations. Better feedback is specific, and the consequences are clear: "A person in your role is expected to have completed six cases in the month. You have consistently completed three. You need to increase your output to keep your job."

Finally, a difficult message is easier to hear when it's delivered with sensitivity. You can lessen the sting by acknowledging, for example, how hard the person is trying and that the poor performance isn't due to lack of effort, but don't downplay the need for improvement. In treating the situation with care, don't take away the employee's responsibility for change.

Learning for Leaders – Ask yourself if your underperformers understand what they need to do differently. If not, clarify.

Coaches Corner – When clients talk about poor performers, ask whether they are doing as much as they can to turn the situation around.

If you have questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to sandy@learningadvantageinc.com

Great Managers: The X Factor Driving Engagement

The best companies want engaged employees. The Gallup Organization surveyed over 30,000 employees in 2018 and found that fully two-thirds said they were disengaged from their work. Imagine the loss of productivity, poor customer relations and opportunities that are missed when only a third of employees are engaged and committed to their jobs.

Gallup, known for the quality and reliability of their surveys, took 25 years' worth of interviews with over one million workers and distilled the attributes of organizational success and employee engagement into 12 questions, known as the Q12. In their book, *First, Break All The Rules*, Marcus Buckingham and Curt Coffman document Gallup's study and delve in these questions:

1. Do I know what is expected of me at work?
2. Do I have the materials and equipment I need to do my work right?
3. At work, do I have the opportunity to do what I do best every day?
4. In the last 7 days, have I received recognition or praise for doing good work?
5. Does my supervisor, or someone at work, seem to care about me as a person?
6. Is there someone at work who encourages my development?
7. At work, do my opinions seem to count?
8. Does the mission/purpose of my company make me feel my job is important?
9. Are my associates (fellow employees) committed to doing quality work?
10. Do I have a best friend at work?
11. In the last six months, has someone at work talked to me about my progress?
12. This last year, have I had opportunities at work to learn and grow?

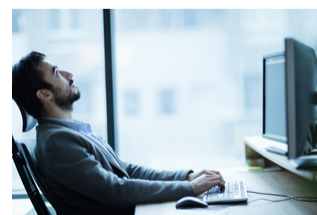
These questions point to the key difference that makes a difference when it comes to organizational success: the quality of employees' relationships with their managers. Given that managers play a significant role in employees' job satisfaction and productivity, what should you as a manager do to increase employee engagement?

Recognize employees are people, not cogs in a wheel.

Managers who coach and mentor are interested in the whole person; to them, employees are not just resources to be applied to a task. They get to know what their employees care about, their families, interests and career goals. In addition, they provide clear job expectations to their employees and make sure they have the tools they need to do a good job. They listen to employees' opinions and solicit their ideas.



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