



Mobley's Musings: It's not how you start. It's how you finish.

Almost all of my clients put a lot of thought and energy into the start of an engagement. They work hard to set clear expectations and build strong relationships with the client.

During a recent remodeling job at my house, I was heartened by the effort the contractors put into the initial phase of the project. Their contract clearly detailed the scope of the work — what they would do and not do and the price for the job — giving me confidence that we had a shared understanding of the project. Unfortunately, that good beginning was a poor portent of problems to come.

Difficulties arose chiefly in two areas: communication and finishing the job. We were told the workers would arrive at 8 a.m. on specific days. Some days they were an hour or more late; one day nobody showed up at all. We had put our own schedule on hold to be home for the workers, but our being inconvenienced when they didn't meet their commitments didn't seem to matter to them. Worst of all, the workers are dragging their feet with the last few tasks.

After all, the job isn't really completed until all the tools and materials are gone, the area is clean, and we can use the renovated space. Those warm feelings I had at the start of the project have been eclipsed by my frustration over how long it is taking to finish.

Remember that communication is key to any good relationship. Research shows that clients value knowing what is going on during a project as much as getting the job done. And given recency bias, clients are much more likely to remember the close of the project than all the good work done at the beginning. "All's well that ends well" is one of Shakespeare's comedies, but it's also a reminder to put the same energy into completing a job as starting it.

Sandy



Ask Sandy

Impervious to feedback

In workshops on how to give feedback, I'm often asked what to do when the feedback falls on deaf ears. People ignore feedback for various reasons: they may think it isn't valid, the source is not competent to judge, or they're so important to the organization that they can do whatever they want.

In my experience, piercing a person's anti-feedback armor and making them more open to hearing it can be achieved when:

- Leaders question them into clarity
- They gather their own feedback
- They experience a significant emotional event

Kyle's organization was responsible for data security. Kyle was good at his job but pushed back whenever other groups voiced concerns about any aspect of security. His manager had tried to give Kyle feedback, but he was dismissive. Rather than argue with Kyle, I suggested his manager ask questions to get him to think differently. For example, he might ask Kyle, "If one of the divisions has a breach and you haven't listened to their concerns, how do you want to handle that?" He could also remind Kyle of the role that other group leaders play in his career: "When I go into calibration sessions to determine bonuses and promotions, how can I get the other division managers to advocate for you?"

When Kyle made the connection that his future success was tied to his relationship with other leaders, he accepted and started acting on their feedback. When people are told something, they may agree or disagree with it, but they rarely think about it. But when they are asked questions, they have to think and internalize, and as a result, those conversations are not so easily dismissed.

Another leader, Jay, described his manager, Paul, as being resistant to feedback. While Paul was good at the technical aspects of his job, he was not collaborative with his peers and tended to be sarcastic or make rude comments during meetings. Thinking he was being funny, he would say things like, "Well, if you were as smart as me, you would know your solution won't work." He had no idea how offensive his comments were. When Jay gave him that feedback, Paul dismissed it. Jay then asked him to gather feedback directly from his peers on his strengths and areas for improvement. When his peers told him, they found him rude and dismissive, he could no longer ignore the feedback. He asked Jay if he could get a coach to help him work on building better relationships.

Sometimes a person never admits to shortcomings until they face a significant emotional event that is painful enough to cause a reset and self-reflection. Perhaps they get fired or their spouse asks for a divorce, shattering their illusions of how wonderful they are. Sadly, that shock may be the first time they open themselves up to receiving feedback.

As a leader responsible for the health of your team you may not be able to wait for a team member to wake up to feedback. In that case, I suggest not wasting any more time trying to break through. Document the performance issues and if possible, let the person go. Put your energy into the people who want to learn and grow.

Learning for Leaders: Determine the best approach to create openness to feedback. If that fails, move the person out.

Coaches Corner: Help your leaders implement strategies with resistant people. And support them if none of their efforts succeed.

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



Am I Invisible?

When I was in graduate school, the professor asked our math class if anyone wanted to go sailing on Friday. There were only ten of us in the class, and none of the nine men raised their hands. But I, the only woman, raised my hand as high as I could get it. The professor looked around and said, "Well, I go every Friday, so if anyone is interested let me know." After class, I stopped by his desk and told him I would love to go sailing. I could see his hesitancy. He asked if I could swim and if I was afraid of the water. I said I could swim and loved the water. He reluctantly agreed and told me where to meet him. We had a great time sailing all summer long. One day I asked why he had seemed reticent to have me join him. He said he had three daughters and none of them liked sailing and he was sure I was another wimpy girl. This was neither the first nor the last time I was underestimated.

I have heard that being perceived as too young, not rich, or not smart doesn't have to be a disadvantage. If people underestimate you, you can turn their preconceptions around to your benefit.

Molly is an auditor. She is small, looks young for her age, and is pretty and bubbly. Many clients have tried to pull the wool over her eyes with questionable accounting maneuvers, thinking her too inexperienced to figure out what they're doing. Much to their surprise she is wicked smart and not easily fooled. Her seemingly naïve questions caused them to let down their guard and allowed her to find the ploys they were trying to hide.

Similarly Ed is a warm, affable man who doesn't appear too sharp. He is responsible for procurement for his organization. Vendors sometimes try to overcharge him, not realizing that he has done his homework and knows exactly what is a fair price for the things he is ordering. By downplaying his smarts Ed is able to determine which vendors are dealing with him honestly.

Sometimes, however, being underestimated can lead to being overlooked.

Ming was part of an analytics team. She was expert in modeling and could even write the code for her programs. She watched for a few years as her co-workers were promoted over her. While she got outstanding evaluations, she wasn't considered for promotion. Disappointed, she started applying for leadership positions in other companies. When she got a new job offer and told her manager why she was leaving, he offered her a management job if she would stay. He said he had no idea she was interested in moving up.

I am often surprised when clients tell me they haven't asked for a promotion or indicated they are interested in taking on more responsibility. Unfortunately, your managers aren't mind readers and good work does not speak for itself; if you don't let leaders know what you're capable of, you can become invisible.

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