



Mobley's Musings— Doing Good Deeds

I never liked the adage “no good deed goes unpunished.” It’s just too cynical for the idealist in me. But I have to admit that now and then I find myself agreeing with the sentiment.

When Molly noticed her colleague Ginny often missed deadlines she asked if she could help. Ginny gratefully handed off one of her tasks to Molly. This went on for a few months until Ginny got promoted. Asked why she hadn’t been promoted; Molly’s boss told her she was good at doing routine tasks but not the more strategic work that Ginny does. Her boss wasn’t aware that Molly had been helping Ginny do that work for several months.

Tom has a habit of editing his staff members’ papers — not just correcting their grammar and spelling but adding transitions to improve flow and reorganizing content. Everyone recognizes that the final product is far superior. So, it’s no surprise that over time his staff members learned they could turn in less-than-final drafts knowing Tom would clean them up. Tom often spent more time editing those drafts than the authors spent writing them.

Molly and Tom like helping others, and so do I. But help can become a crutch for the other person or can tell their inner voice that they’re incompetent. Tom’s staff members will never improve their writing skills, and Ginny will assume someone will be there to pick up the slack if she can’t manage her workload.

If you like helping, you might want to assess whether your help is really helping. Be thoughtful about how the other person may perceive your help and be strategic in the type of help you provide. To cite another adage, teaching a person to fish is better than handing out fishes.

Sandy



Sandy Mobley

Ask Sandy Helping Staff Find Their Voice

Much career advice recommends that leaders delegate tasks so their staff can grow personally and professionally. When done well, delegating tasks can help staff learn and become stronger. But another, less-recognized approach to building competency is for leaders to, in a sense, delegate their voice. Just as leaders want a staff member to feel comfortable taking on new tasks, they also want them to speak with confidence and authority. For example, even though a leader knows how to answer a question posed by a client or senior management, he can suggest that a junior

employee respond, delegating his voice so that the staff member can develop their own and grow.

But like delegating tasks, delegating your voice isn’t always easy. Seeing a new hire struggle to respond to a client’s question may make you want to jump in and offer your opinion. But grabbing back your voice can undermine the new person’s confidence and cause others to dismiss the new person. Instead of growing the new person’s abilities, you’ve created additional work for yourself because people will come to you, not your staff, with questions. When this happens too often, you get a reputation for overshadowing your staff.

How then can leaders delegate their voice while ensuring staff members make the best use of it? As with so much in life, preparation is key. And building in opportunities to coach and give timely feedback can help staff members stay on track.

Laurita is a strong presenter. She communicates skillfully with senior management and clients, knowing what information they need and at what level of detail. Her direct report, Kamal, is a subject matter expert. He knows his stuff but doesn’t know how to tailor his stuff to his audience. Prior to a presentation, Laurita makes sure Kamal understands the audience’s interests and goals. She has Kamal do a run-through of what he intends to present, and she helps him refine his presentation with substantive feedback. She prepares an agenda that includes a break about halfway through Kamal’s presentation, explaining that it will allow him to make any adjustments based on how the audience is responding. Kamal feels supported, not overshadowed, by Laurita’s coaching. Over time Kamal gets better at knowing what an audience wants so his presentation doesn’t get derailed with technical details.

Think about how you can help your direct reports find their voice and become strong, knowledgeable, and confident. A little intentionality in coaching will help set them up for success and lead to positive outcomes for both you and your staff.

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



Hot Buttons: Conflict’s Early Warning Signs

Conflict can occur rapidly, sometimes without warning. You’re talking amicably with a coworker when they make a snarky comment and wham! You feel your skin flush and your chest tighten as your amygdala prepares you to fight, flee, freeze, or appease. Managing conflict is an important skill, and so is the ability to head it off. Knowing what hot buttons can trigger conflict allows you to be proactive and prepare your response before conflict arises.

The assessment I use to identify constructive and destructive conflict behaviors includes hot buttons — also known as pet peeves — that can set someone off and lead to conflict when they see these qualities in others:

- Unreliable – not doing what was agreed to and missing deadlines
- Overly analytical – focusing on technical details that aren’t needed
- Unappreciative – failing to give positive feedback
- Aloof – being hard to approach or not interested in input from others
- Micro-managing – constantly monitoring others’ work
- Self-centered – paying no attention to their impact on others, believing they are always correct
- Abrasive – making loud, harsh, sarcastic, or arrogant comments
- Untrustworthy – taking credit for other’s work, exploitive
- Hostile – being quick to anger and responding by yelling

My clients have noted some pet peeves of their own:

- Overly emotional – crying or becoming inordinately dramatic over a situation
- Negative – insisting nothing will work, seeing only the worst outcomes
- Critical – constantly singling out flaws, both large and small
- Too talkative – saying too much and not getting to the point
- Non-responsive – not returning calls and emails, not answering direct questions

As you read the list, certain people may have come to mind. And when you thought of them you may have felt a bit of that “fight, flee, freeze, or appease” sensation because those people push your hot buttons. I find it interesting that not everyone has the same hot buttons. Some people tolerate micro-managers while others can’t abide excessive talkers. By recognizing your hot buttons, you can be better prepared to forestall conflict when someone pushes those buttons.

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