

JUICY WORK NEWS

Updates from The Learning Advantage

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Mobley's Musings: Finding alternatives to saying no

Sometimes a person makes what seems to them a reasonable request but from our point of view is unreasonable. The challenge is to find a way we can respond to their request that works for us.

To get to yes, it helps to explore why they are making the request, that is, what their real need is. For example, Joan asked if her executive leader could attend our training course designed for supervisors. My first thought was NO! Supervisors might worry that the senior leader would be evaluating their participation and compromise the safe learning environment.

Before I responded, I asked Joan what her leader's goals were for attending. She said he wanted to understand how we were teaching supervisors about company values and ways they can reinforce those values. Now I had a better idea of what was driving the request.

I explained that since the values conversations were interspersed in multiple modules throughout the five-day course, it would be a huge time commitment for him to sit in. I asked I could meet his need if I sent him an outline of the five-day course and highlighted the values conversations. She said that would give him just what he needed. Instead of burning a bridge by saying no, I was able to satisfy the leader's need with a quick conversation while also showing that I was considerate of demands on the leader's time.



Tackling the Roots of Feedback Resistance

It is mid-year performance management time and clients are working to ensure their staff know whether they are on track and where they need to bump up their efforts. Some employees, when receiving constructive feedback, are unwilling to accept what their manager has to say. In listening to clients' reports on these conversations, I find the unwillingness or inability to accept critical feedback can be traced to either (1) a habit of blaming others or (2) a lack of self-awareness.

But I also point out that blaming others makes them look weak and helpless. They aren't taking responsibility for their actions, and more than that, they're positioning themselves as a victim, which does not inspire confidence. By claiming they couldn't meet their goals because

When someone makes a request you can't say yes to, don't end the conversation there. Dig deeper to understand the need and uncover an alternative you can say yes to.



Ask Sandy Integrity about Urgency

People complain that when they are given an urgent request and rush to get it done, all too often they find their work languishes on someone's desk, ignored sometimes for days. How did something urgent become inconsequential?

Perhaps the request was urgent at the time but another, even more urgent matter came up. If the person making the request doesn't trust the employee to get it done on time, they may overstate its urgency. Or maybe the requester thinks the employee will take pride in being given an urgent assignment and work more diligently.

Like the boy who cried "wolf," a manager who cries "urgent" too often (and unjustifiably) risks being ignored when a request truly is urgent.

If you want people to accept and respond to an urgent request, explain why it is urgent and, when the request is completed, be sure to acknowledge and put their work product to use. If your urgent request is due to poor planning on your part, own up to it and apologize when requesting assistance.

Of course, things happen and priorities change. If you learn your request is no longer urgent, let the employee know as soon as possible and give them a revised deadline. And if it turns out that what you requested is no longer needed after the work has been done, thank the person for their quick response and explain the changed circumstances. Let the employee know you will do what you can to avoid future "fire drills."

If you have any questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to:

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someone else didn't do their part, it means they lack influence skills, problem-solving skills, and project management skills. In no way would these deficiencies make me let them off the hook. But they *would* make me think twice about future assignments.

When someone doesn't meet a deadline or fulfill a request, I don't want to hear excuses. What I want to hear is what they are doing to get back on track and when the request will be completed. I'm not as interested in knowing why they missed the deadline as I am in learning how they plan to finish the job and in what timeframe. When the dust settles and the task has been completed, I will also want to hear from them what they will do to avoid this situation again.

When critical feedback comes as a surprise, it may be because the person is unaware of their behavior. In these cases I look for safe ways to increase their self-awareness and see themselves as others see them. One very intelligent leader was unaware that he cut people off in conversations and they often felt dismissed by him. During our conversation he told me about a company where he felt management didn't appreciate his ideas.



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