

JUICY WORK NEWS

Updates from The Learning Advantage

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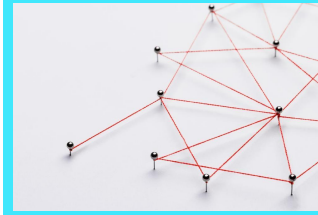
Mobley's Musings: Does Perfect Matter?

Some clients tell me they're perfectionists. They claim it as a badge of honor, a higher calling that sets them apart from others and bestows an elevated degree of importance. But I wonder: do our clients expect perfection? I certainly want excellence from my vendors and staff, but I don't want to wait for — or pay for — perfection.

At what point is perfection appreciated over mere excellence? I appreciate having my car washed but I won't complain about a few water spots. Likewise, I don't expect the crew that mows my lawn to use a ruler and scissors to ensure every blade of grass is the same height. On the other hand, if I am having surgery, I expect excellence as a baseline and would like my surgeon to strive for perfection, especially if the risks are big.

When I led quality training at Hewlett Packard, quality meant meeting customer expectations. Exceeding those expectations may have benefits but they can come at a cost. The example often used was giving a Mercedes to a customer who wanted a VW. While they might be delighted at first, the higher cost of maintaining and insuring the car might have the opposite effect.

I hear leaders complain about staff who give them a “perfect” deliverable weeks after it was needed when an excellent report submitted on time would



Why Do I Have to Connect the Dots?

I work with some brilliant leaders who see solutions to issues long before their peers and directs and often before their bosses. Their acuity can make them become impatient and cranky when others don't see what is obvious to them. When asked for clarification they claim they don't have time to bring everyone along and they've already explained their thinking enough.

If this sounds like you, your choice is to remain irritated or to help others — and promote buy-in for the solution — by connecting the dots for them.

There are many approaches to “dot connection,” and you can even skip some of the smaller dots sometimes. But the most successful method is to start where your team is and build their knowledge as you lead them to what is

have met their expectations. Many deliverables are iterated, incorporating new perspectives and solutions. Because a report or product might go through several iterations before the final result, time spent making the initial deliverable perfect could be a wasted effort.

I suggest that clients let the recipient of their work define the quality expectation. And if after getting that clarification they see an opportunity to take the effort to a higher level, they should first assess if the client will appreciate it.

Sometimes claiming to be a perfectionist is a ploy to excuse poor time management or an inability to delegate work. Think about whether being excellent at your job would be sufficient to meet expectations — and deadlines — so you wouldn't need to make excuses.



Ask Sandy

How to Handle Layoffs with Grace

For some organizations and especially in some industries, layoffs are a simple fact of work life. Whether it's due to a downturn in the economy, corporate restructuring, or reduced demand for its products and services, an organization turns to layoffs to reduce costs and remain viable. No one enjoys having to lay off employees, and of course, it's never pleasant to be laid off. Even employees who "survive" a layoff can become demoralized by having to take on more work and may jump ship when conditions improve.

Managers play an important part in making layoffs less painful. When possible, they should meet with employees in person and be prepared to explain what benefits they will receive. It's also important to bolster employees' self-esteem so they feel good about the organization and themselves. Layoffs typically are not due to poor performance, but if there were performance issues, this is not the time to bring them up, regardless of whether the employee had been made aware of them before.

clear to you. A leader I know draws on his experience as a college teacher when he notices his associates aren't following him. If he is in a meeting and his colleagues, like his students, are giving him blank stares, he goes to the white board and jots down what facts and assumptions everyone can agree on. He then moves them through his analysis, adding details as needed to connect the steps and arrive at his conclusion.

Using this approach, you can only move as fast as the slowest element in the group, which admittedly can be trying, but it does have some benefits. Getting everyone up to speed helps speed the progress of the whole. Secondly, if others are expected to implement your solution, having deeper understanding of it will make sure they can do so successfully. Lastly, sharing your knowledge builds strong relationships with associates.

Sometimes connecting the dots can't be accomplished in one pass. Some people need more time to absorb the concepts and see the connections than can happen in a single meeting. One way I think of it is to consider how I would go about teaching the concept. How can I break the concept down into digestible parts? How should the parts be

Employees who are being laid off should do what they can to leave on a positive note. Complaining about the process, questioning why less experienced employees weren't let go, or blaming the boss for mismanagement is not a good strategy. It will not change the situation and only results in negative reactions. If there is time, it's best to help facilitate a smooth transition by documenting work products and tasks so someone else can step in without undue difficulty.

Layoffs are hard on everyone. Do what you can to ease an already difficult situation by taking the high road when dealing with others. After all, you never know who you might meet again during your career.

If you have any questions you'd like Sandy to address in future newsletters, email them to:
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sequenced and how much time does it require? What elements of the problem do they need to understand to see the whole? What do they know and don't know?

For some leaders, their big-picture focus conflicts with effective dot connection. If you are fixated on the big picture you may leave out dots that are necessary for others' understanding. In that case, it may be better to ask someone closer to the issue to explain your analysis.

Taking the time to connect the dots is one way you can help people learn and grow while contributing to a successful outcome. Avoid frustration and harness that energy into creative techniques to help others learn.

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