



# Scolding the Group

October 2011  
Volume 10 Issue 10



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**Do you have topic ideas? Comments or questions?**

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**O**ften managers resort to scolding the group for failing to perform. This is completely ineffective, in fact it is worse than ineffective, it is counter-productive, creating the very opposite results intended. Here is why.

Sure, sure, movies are full of the coach scolding the team for a lousy first half and then with the coach's great half-time motivational speech, the team rushes onto to field to pull out the win we all love – and expect. Unfortunately, real life is anything but so predictable.

Let me hit you between the eyes: not only is scolding the group counter-productive, it is cowardly.

### Looking at the Situation

When a group is scolded, here is what happens: (i) The slackers within the group, do not take the message to heart, and assume the message is for others – because that is the very nature of slackers – not pushers, not overly conscientious, rarely highly committed. (ii) The conscientious ones, the performers, on the other hand, take the message to heart. They assume the blame and feel that they have not done enough. They have busted their butts, but, it appears to have been to no avail. They sense a frustration at not pleasing the coach. Not only do they feel bad about themselves, they question their own abilities to perform for the coach and start on the road to quitting the organization because their extreme effort appears 'not enough' or 'not ap-

preciated'.

### Cowardly Act

When the coach scolds the group, there is no need to identify or single out the non-performers, i.e. it attempts to avoid direct one-on-one confrontation (the so-called cowardly approach).

In fact one-on-one confrontations are needed so there is clarity about what is not happening with individuals and to discover what has to be done. Instead of public scolding, the non-performers should be singled out and addressed individually and privately by the coach.

### What Needs to be Done

In those individual confrontations, berating and belittling the individual will get the coach nowhere because the individual's defensive reaction will dominate the individual's response. The person will sit through the coach's berating with the thought: "What an ass my boss is!" – and very little else.

Remember one thing: **most people do not set out to do poorly.**

Poor performance is never intentional.<sup>1</sup> People,

<sup>1</sup> Well, almost never – but if poor performance is an intentional act, we have a totally different issue to deal with, which is not within the scope of this paper.



within the context of the moment do what they think is correct and appropriate. When people fail it is usually because of some misunderstanding. It simply has to be that way.

Specifically, the number one reason for a misunderstanding is a lack of clarity of goals. So the goals need to be stated simply and unequivocally. Put it in writing beforehand.

The number two reason for a misunderstanding is lack of mutual agreement of those goals. If a person is asked to sell 20 tickets but does not agree that such is possible, the person will not sell 20; you will be lucky if the person sells 2 tickets. However, if, instead, a mutual agreement is reached to sell 10 tickets, then that person will ardently make the effort to sell 10. Which do you prefer, 2 or 10? Why fiddle with an improbable 20?

The number three reason for failure to meet goals is the inability to execute. Now you need to ask the person: "What do you need from me (or us) to allow you to do the job you thought you could do?" Discuss whether those needs can be met. If they cannot, revise the goals to a more realistic level.

If none of the above actions seems to work, then a change of personnel is probably warranted. That is, you must deal with the individual, not the group. If you are unhappy with the continued 'non-performance' of the group, you have only yourself to blame. That begs another question – that follows.

### **What can I expect from the group?**

We would all like to have a super team of highly performing individuals in our group, but Pareto's 80/20 law tells us that it is wrong to expect excellence from all. That is, 20% of the people

in a group make up 80% of the total performance. 20% of your people will be late 80% of the time. 20% of your clients will deliver 80% of your income. 20% of your sales team will produce 80% of your sales volume. 80% of your weekly diet is made up of the same 20% of the foods available. Some years ago before the salary cap in the NHL, the New York Rangers, with its unlimited budget, naively attempted to beat Pareto's law by hiring superstars for every position. If 10 players scored 30 goals with other teams, they, encouraged by superstars on every side, should collectively provide at least 300 goals with New York. Right? They barely hit 100 goals. The highest paid team with arguably the best players in the league finished the season 18th in the roster of 30 teams.

### **Conclusion**

Nurture each member of your group to extract from them the best you can, one by one, tuning here, paring there so that collectively your team delivers 83% rather than 80%. Realize that 83% puts you ahead of the competitor still laboring at 80% with its scolding frame of mind. That 3% can be a significant difference.

Good luck

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