



100% Goal

March 2008
Volume 7 Issue 3



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We live in a society where obfuscation appears inbred. People seem to fear being direct, especially when it comes to providing ‘bad’ news about performance. Most news is not bad, if it is truthful and avoids being hurtful. This paper offers guidance on how to talk directly about success and failure, adult like, without bias or negative emotions – to the benefit of all concerned.

1. Why the Truth does not Hurt

On the job, supervisors and bosses are quick to offer comments for good work but refrain from discussions about a job not well done. It is no wonder that most annual reviews or terminations surprise the worker, because the person’s mind is full of a history of praise, not negatives. In order for people to be able to perform a task, they need feedback of both the positive and negatives of what they are doing. If they know where they stand vis-a-vis the job, they can do more of the good stuff and less of the negative things. Negatives, therefore, need to be delivered factually, not hurtfully. How often have you heard someone say, something like: “Thanks for telling me that, I was unaware that I affected people that way.” Now the individual can move forward. On the other hand, the failure to point out the negative can leave fuzziness, innuendo, suspicion and fear – without resolving anything. Trying not to hurt the person by withholding truth harms the person a lot more as often they struggle along for weeks or months, without accurate information.

2. How the Truth can Hurt

The truth can hurt if (a) it fails to be sensitive to the situation or (b) it is delivered with negative emotions.

While honesty may be the best policy, it is not absolutely the right policy. That is, if the truth will hurt a person unnecessarily, it should be withheld. For example, Harry your co-worker has suffered a number of emotional setbacks in the past few days – the death of his brother, moving out from his spouse this week and you are aware that Harry’s job will be terminated in a two months. This is NOT the time to tell him. You would heap hurt onto further hurt within the same small timeframe. Let the appropriate person tell Harry at the appropriate time.

Negative emotions often enter unnecessarily into difficult situations. For example you are firing an individual, Ruth. This is not the time to shout and scream or even to give her a litany of all her faults. While they may be true in your mind, what purpose is



served by listing them now? The job is done; you are releasing her. Everything you need to say is encompassed in the act of termination. No more negatives are required. Instead your thoughts should be towards preserving her dignity at this difficult moment for her. “We no longer feel there is a match between what you do and what we expect in this job.” “The fact that there is a mismatch is not necessarily your fault; if there is a fault at all, it may have begun with us.” These should be the most negative comment you might make. Not: “You idiot, you asked for this, what with all your laziness, etc., etc.!” To continue helpfully: “Ruth, we would like to see you move forward to a position that will be more suitable to you. To that end we are offering you assistance of.....” “We really wish you well.”

3. Creating the Real Truth

The real truth about the job can be encompassed very simply by defining the expected outcomes for the position. These should be expressed quantitatively. Agree between yourself and the employee of what the most important parts of the employee’s job are. Quantify the expectations of Thomas, the worker: “To move all boxes from the holding area that arrive by 4 pm each day, into the shipping area for evening delivery.” “To know that you are successful in doing this, Thomas, the holding area will be checked by me at 4:05 pm each day.” You do not tell Thomas specifically how to do the job, but focus on the outcome, allowing him to choose his own methods (within whatever working guidelines exist within your plant).

4. 100% is not Perfection

You well know that Thomas, as good as he may be, can-

not sustain this outcome without fail. What if he is ill and a substitute has to fill in for him? So you may offer some leeway. Shall we propose 5%? Let us say the average number of packages to be transferred is 100 per day or, in a 233-day work year, Thomas would deliver $100 \times 233 = 23,300$ packages – or 1,942 per month, on average. Allowing 5% forgiveness would be 1,844 or let us round it to 1,800 per month as an acceptable target. Less than 1,800 would be unacceptable. So Thomas must achieve 100% of this 1,800 target – less than that is considered failure. As long as Thomas has agreed to the 1,800 target as reasonable for him, he will ensure that he achieves it; he will be very disappointed with himself if he does not. 100% of the target is acceptable, 99% is not. Since initially we supposed he could move 1,942 per month and that target is now set at 1,800 we have been reasonable. 1,800 (namely 100%) is not perfection but it is the clear goal.

Now imprecision has been removed. Clarity rules the day. Emotion is nowhere to be found. Do this job and we will all be happy. Fail to achieve 100% and no one will be pleased, not even Thomas.

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