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Managing Technical Employees

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Managing Technical Employees

Course Contents

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This course is based on the assumption that you are now in a leadership or management role, and perhaps multiple leadership roles, at this point in your life. When you began your professional career, being "in charge," as you are now, may not have been what you expected. You were competent in your technical field as a subject-matter-expert. But your work got noticed by someone. Or, you may have proactively sought career advancement, and management was the obvious next step. In either case, you now find yourself in a position to be a more significant contributor to your organization, and perhaps to your community and profession, as well. With this increased responsibility comes more necessity to work with and through other people. You make presentations to clients, regulators, and public officials; manage contractors, vendors, and other technical, professional, and administrative employees; and lead cross-functional teams. You manage projects, and you are increasingly responsible and accountable for the work of other people.

You have probably discovered that getting work done through others can be demanding. Some of your responsibilities as a leader have been difficult. If "they" just did things like you do them, life at work would be so much easier! Making sense of the physical elements, tools, and data of your profession or trade are much more predictable and less frustrating than the people aspects. The former make sense; they follow the rules of logic, and even when the challenges are complex, you can ultimately arrive at a workable solution.

People are usually not as logical and predictable as other aspects of the job. Getting people on board with your agenda and moving then all in the same direction is a very challenging role. However, if you function as a leader, this is now your most essential task—getting the work done through other people. The skills you learned as an engineer, architect, contractor, surveyor or similar professional do not work as well when applied to human relationships, sometimes leaving you frustrated and perhaps struggling to achieve the results you seek.

Leadership skills can be learned, however, and that is exactly what this course is designed to help you do. If you are willing to expand your thinking, you will be able to develop more effective strategies for leading others, especially if you make the commitment to practice these ideas. Most of the ideas in this course are relatively simple. That does not mean, however, that they are easy to apply. Not by a long shot! The so-called "soft skills" are often harder to master than the "hard skills."

If you are frustrated by your inability to get others to comply willingly and enthusiastically, you are not alone. There is also nothing "wrong with" you. You have probably focused your professional development on more left-brain functions that are the foundation of excellence in technical areas. Consequently, the right side of your brain has remained less well-developed. Unknowingly, you may have taken an ineffective approach when working with others. Applying logical, sequential, analytical thinking, which worked well when you were primarily a subject-matter expert, to the people aspects of your job has rendered you ineffective; you have used the wrong tools. Leadership skills are different skills that can you can learn, if you are willing. You will be gaining a new set of tools which will work more effectively to motivate and communicate with people. You can learn to do it right—with the result that you accomplish more and experience less work and personal stress. The emphasis of this course is on helping you stretch and grow your right brain competencies to complement the outstanding skills you already possess in your technical specialty.

Many ideas presented here will be familiar; others will seem like common sense. Putting them together in an integrated and consistent way, however requires a new way of thinking and a great deal of practice. But if you commit to make some changes, you WILL become more effective in your leadership role and in your ability to influence people and manage performance.

The only prerequisite from you is a willingness to try some new ideas and approaches with your own direct reports, peers, clients, and others. You have complete control over your own behavior and attitudes. By examining and refining your thoughts and behaviors in regard to leadership and working with others, you can make changes in your own behavior. You can and will change the behavior of others in relation to you if you *change yourself first*. Despite a well-known phrase to the contrary, it IS possible to change other people. However, you must first begin by changing yourself. Good leaders from all walks of life carefully monitor their own attitudes and habits. They assess how they are currently doing and resolve to make personal changes where needed. You can, too.

Why Today's Leaders Need New Skills

The world has changed dramatically in the last few decades, your organization has changed, and workers have changed. Leadership techniques and behaviors that may have worked in the past may no longer be effective with the workforce of the 21st century. Workers today are better educated, more independent, and are not hesitant to change employers because they have options. *Leaders can't keep leading using the same skills that were used in the organization of the past.* Leading an organization or part of an organization today requires a higher level of strategic skills and human relations skills than in the past. Upgrading skills will help you keep your organization productive into the future and help ensure that you have a successful and satisfying career. Much research has indicated that poor leadership and human relations skills are much more likely to derail a professional career than lack of knowledge or technical expertise.

As organizations become leaner, leaders at all levels are increasingly called upon to take on more responsibility. It is no longer enough for you to know the details and the technical issues. When you focus your attention on specific details, you miss the opportunity to add value to your organization by integrating the bigger picture. It is the ability to look more widely, understand the impact of your work on others, and see the bigger picture that is so crucial to leadership today. Thus, a higher level of strategic skills is critical. Rather than pulling things into pieces, his kind of thinking requires more assimilation and integration of material into a macro approach. This perspective is also more effective in working with people.

Your leadership success will also depend, not upon an ability to do all the jobs you lead, but on your ability to lead others to do those jobs and do them well. It's important to be able to effectively motivate others to outstanding performance. Many organizational problems are directly related to poor individual and team performance. A high level of people-management skills is, therefore, essential for all leaders in the organization of the twenty-first century.

Being a Leader Makes You Different

When you were put into a leadership role, certain things changed. If you experienced a promotion within the same organization, you became *different from* and in some ways *set apart from* the people you used to work closely with, just by virtue of your new role. Where you used to be equals before you were promoted into the leadership ranks, now you probably find yourself having to take a new look at how to relate to or deal with your former coworkers. Are they still your "friends" once you are their leader, or are you now "the boss"? If you came into your leadership position directly from outside the organization without serving time "in the trenches," your problem may be slightly different—not having relationships or trust on which to build your leadership. If you went out on your own and started your own business, you also experienced a transition: you are "different" now because you are the boss, and others depend on you in new ways. You are different from your employees in certain ways.

Being a leader will change how you relate to team members, and it is normal to feel uncertain at time about how to behave in relation to them, unless you have been well-trained and experienced in your role. Even experienced leaders are sometimes confronted with challenges when their duty to their company or boss must be balanced with their friendship with an employee. Compare these two extremes:

- If you remove yourself entirely from your group and become nothing but a "company person," you may succeed in objectively passing on company policies and exercising impartial judgment. But your employees may resent and mistrust you and may be reluctant to work hard when the chips are down.

- On the other hand, if you continue to try to be close and special friends with those you lead, you may have their complete trust, but you may be unable to fairly implement company policy or lead them through needed change when it goes against their wishes.

Being a leader requires balancing between being too friendly and being too distant.

Tips for Finding Balance

It's hard to have an unequal relationship on the job (leader-follower) and an equal relationship off the job (friend-friend). It's not impossible, but it is difficult. Your judgment as a leader may be clouded, and you are more open to charges of favoritism. Even so, good relationships on the job are one of the main keys to productivity. When your relationship as a leader with others who work for you is amicable, you will get much better performance. It *is* possible to be friendly with your employees, and you should be friendly. You can treat each other with respect at work without being close friends. Here are some ideas to consider:

- If you had a preexisting friendship before you became the boss, sit down with your friend and have a frank discussion, so that each of you is clear about the new expectations on the job. Let them know that the performance standards will be the same for them as for others. Be especially mindful of treating this person the same as other employees while on duty.

- With direct reports you have not previously been close to, remain friendly, pleasant, and available, but don't try to get close.

- It will probably make your work life easier if you don't try to cultivate close friendships or romantic relationships with those you lead.

Leadership in the Middle

The main purpose of this section is to encourage you to consider good examples of leadership you have seen around you. Good leaders make you want to follow them voluntarily in order to achieve shared goals. But how do they accomplish that? What really makes a leader exceptional? What things does this kind of leader do that encourage people to trust and follow him or her? Sometimes these qualities may seem hard to define. Exceptional leaders may make it look so easy that you may scratch your head and say, "How do they do it! How do they get people to fall in line like that?" However, if you can identify what some of these qualities are, you may be better able to develop many of these qualities yourself and encourage others to follow you willingly. If you have a good idea where you are going, it's easier to get there.

While it may be challenging to fully describe what makes a leader exceptional, a good place to begin the discussion is by identifying some of the things most people *don't* want in a leader or a boss. Here is a partial list. You may have some pet peeves of your own you would add.

People generally don't appreciate or respect the boss who is…

- Disinterested in them or in their work—obviously doesn't care about them.
- Critical—nothing is ever good enough.
- Temperamental—explodes in anger.
- Moody and unpredictable or cold and distant.
- Seemingly without clear goals or direction.
- Only interested in making herself or himself look good in front of *the big boss*.
- Unable to make a decision and stick to it.
- Never available to listen or give guidance.
- A micromanager, always looking over their shoulders.

Whatever is on your list, it's important to remember the things you want to avoid when you think seriously about how you want to lead others. Most people have seen their share of poor leadership examples. When you have seen so many poor models, it's easy to fall back into the same bad habits yourself simply by default. Which items on the above list describe you?

Once you have looked at your own attitudes and thought about your part in creating the frustration you feel when you are ineffective in your leadership, it will take a conscious effort on your part to build in the right kinds of leadership *actions* so employees view you as an excellent boss—a leader they will follow gladly. This is the real key—getting people to follow because they want to. Any leader can issue orders, but no matter how good your compliance enforcement or what threats are involved with noncompliance, you will never succeed in getting people's best if your leadership is built on these approaches. The best can only be gotten voluntarily from people who WANT to give you all they've got.

Look for Role Models

You are fortunate if you can identify a number of people who were good leaders in your experience. It's important to consciously begin looking around you for models of good leadership in order to improve your own leadership effectiveness. Think back over your life: various adults who were influential in your early life, and bosses and others from more recent times. Consider well-known people with character and people from history who seem to display admirable leadership qualities. Models worthy of being emulated come from all walks of life. Not all of them have a title, but they act like leaders nevertheless, encouraging and inspiring others to follow.

You may not be able to come up with any *one* ideal person who embodies everything you think is important. Your ideal leader may be a composite of a number of people. Keep those qualities and those people in mind as you think about qualities that make for exceptional leadership—qualities that you want to emulate.

Developing Personal Character

Leadership is based on having a fundamentally positive, caring attitude toward others. The Arbinger Institute's extensive research on self-deception in individuals reveals clearly that while human beings nearly always want to do right by others and most even know what those right things are, people get so caught up in their own erroneous perceptions of others that they are rendered ineffective in dealing with those others. The truth is that most of us act out of habit toward others, without our even realizing that we are creating many of our own problems. We do this by failing to recognize and acknowledge their basic humanity and positive worth.

Fundamentally, *before you go any further in this course*, or before you can ever become more effective in leading others, you must ask yourself honestly how you see and treat others. Do you believe, deep down, that people are good and want to treat them fairly? It's essential that you treat others with genuine respect—treating them like people and not like objects. Failure to truly and consistently treat people—every single person you encounter—as people will results in numerous problems in work and personal relationships. Here are some indicators that might tell you if you are treating people like objects rather than like people:

- You have little patience with people who are serving you as a customer (the convenience store clerk or the postal worker).
- You chastise people for inappropriate behavior.
- You see everyone's faults clearly and easily and find it more difficult to identify their good qualities.
- You regularly are involved in arguments or disagreements with people at work, sometimes in front of others.
- You have a fairly sizeable list of people you find hard to work with.
- You commonly suffer from communication mix-ups.
- You look carefully for who is to blame when something goes wrong.
- You find the performance of many of those around you to be of poor or mediocre quality.
- You rarely have time to listen to others.
- You are more concerned about results than what it took to achieve those results.
- You obviously respond negatively to bad news
- You are guarded in the information you are willing to share because "information is power."
- You regularly make most decisions yourself rather than inviting participation.

If one or more of the above describe you, then it's important that you begin with self-examination and commitment to change. If you fail to do so, any skills you learn will simply be ineffective because they will be perceived by others as being manipulative. You need to work on treating people with genuine respect. Leadership requires patience and what is often referred to as "emotional intelligence." If you don't have this quality of social maturity and personal character, either develop it or give up your leadership role. It's not optional!

Work on your attitude first. To treat people like human beings, consider the following.

- If you truly believe that people are your equals, they respond to you with much more enthusiasm. This means you treat them as if what they wanted in your joint interaction is equally important and valid as what you want. You are not superior to them (even if you outrank them), and they are not superior to you. You look favorably on what they bring to the interaction. You consider their needs and discuss those openly.
- People always live up to your perceptions of them. If you consider someone a "jerk," they will be; it's guaranteed. Use this lesson to help you treat people as human beings rather than objects. Everyone has positive qualities within them. If you have failed to notice good qualities in someone, you have not looked hard enough, so dig deeper. Approach each person in each interaction with an attitude of appreciation for what he or she DOES have; worry less about what the person doesn't have.
- Pick out one moderately-challenging person, and try an experiment. Try a new attitude and approach with just that individual. Begin consciously treating them more cheerfully and respectfully. (Don't overdo it to the point where they are suspicious. Just be more pleasant.) Deliberately continue to do this for at least 30 days. You will find that the person becomes much more compliant and even worthy of your respect. Before long, the respect that you didn't fully feel in the beginning of your experiment becomes genuine, as you find out there are some truly good qualities your challenging person has.

Start with your own attitude. That is the fundamental bedrock of leadership; without it nothing else can be built.

Communication Begins with Listening

How many times a day or a week do you and another person miscommunicate? How often do you "get your wires crossed" with someone? For most people, many days are filled with examples of wasted time because one or more parties did not fully listen or clarify their understanding of the conversation. This results in mistakes, rework, conflict, and mistrust—all of which are costly in our workplaces and tragic in our homes.

Listening is one-half of the skill of communication, and lack of communication is the chief complaint of employees in every organization. Employees cite communication complaints such as, "Nobody ever listens anyway," and "They never tell us anything." Listening is one of the most fundamental skills associated with leadership and with relationships in our personal lives. It may sound like old news, but learning to listen and communicate better will go a long way towards improving trust and morale with all those you work with and will have a positive impact on productivity—theirs and yours.

Very few of us listen as well as we think we do. A recent study revealed that 100% of the people questioned rated themselves better at listening than those around them who knew them well rated them. Listening, or lack of listening, has a powerful impact on those around us. Think about your own listening as we consider the following reasons why is listening can be so important for leaders on the job. You may be able to add additional reasons to this list.

- When you *listen* to people, they begin to trust you, and trust leads to respect. When subordinates respect you, they are much more likely to rally round in time of need and go the extra mile for you, not because they *must*, but because they want to. Do your people respect and trust you? Do they do more than they have to do? Do they always come through on the tough assignments?

- When you *listen* to employees, you often gain excellent ideas and solutions to problems that could save you time and money. You have smart, talented people working for you (If you *don't*, why did you hire them or why have you kept them?) After all, your employees are the ones in the trenches; they are in the best position to discover what works.

- When you *listen* to people, you allow them to clear the air concerning a problem or issue and return to productive work; thus, listening is an investment in improving productivity. This is an important part of your role.

- When you *listen* to employees, you learn of their concerns, frustrations, feelings and goals—information you can take to top management or other decision-makers on a project as planning and goal-setting are taking place.

- When you *listen* to people, you prevent small problems from becoming bigger ones.

Listening is more than Hearing

Psychologists and communication experts tell us that we use many clues in addition to the *words* someone says when we are trying to understand the meaning they want to convey. In fact, it may surprise you that when you are in face-to-face communication, at least 90% of the meaning is taken from these "nonverbal" cues and only about 10% of the meaning comes from the actual words. When you listen, then, you have to use more than your ears. You have to use your eyes too.

If this is true, it may help explain why communication over the telephone, through e-mail, or from words printed on a page are especially challenging. In these cases there are no visual cues, and in the cases of e-mail and hard copy, no voice tone, either. The various channels of communication—body language, voice tone and words—act as checks and balances to each other. The more channels we have, the more opportunity there is to understand the speaker's full meaning. When words are the only channel we have, it is particularly important to consider those words carefully; ask for clarification if you are uncertain.

When you are face-to-face with someone, their nonverbal body language and tone of voice convey meaning. A particular behavior may mean more than one thing, but there is considerable agreement on what those possible meanings may be. The chart below gives some common meanings of bodily cues in American culture. You may be able to add additional signals that you look for. (If you are dealing with people from other cultures, be extremely careful of making assumptions about their body language. While there is some overlap, it's important to get to know them and their culture in order to understand their nonverbal signals more accurately.)

Part of Body	Behavior of the Speaker	Probable Meaning
EYES	Do their eyes meet ours?	Confident, willing, honest
	Do their eyes look down?	Sad, worried, guilty, depressed, dishonest
	Do their eyes look away, to the side?	Concerned about something "out there," in a hurry
FACE	Is the face tight, narrowed?	Angry, worried, pressured
	Is the face loose, relaxed?	Content, pleased, relaxed
MOUTH	Is the mouth tight and set in a straight line?	Serious, concentrating
	Is the mouth turned down?	Sad, depressed
	Is the mouth upturned, relaxed?	Happy, enthusiastic
SHOULDERS	Are the shoulders high, tight, and forward?	Tense, angry, worried
	Are the shoulders held high and back?	Proud, ready to go
	Are the shoulders drooping forward?	Discouraged, depressed
POSTURE/ POSITION	Does the speaker face the listener squarely with open posture? Lean forward?	Confident, serious, paying attention
	Does the speaker face to the side or have a closed posture? Lean away?	Disinterested, unaccepting of what's being said

HAND GESTURES	Is the fist clinched?	Angry, stressed
	Are the hands flying wildly around?	Excited or trying to get attention

Instinctively we seem to know the meaning of these bodily cues, and we agree fairly closely on the meaning of body language. The problem is that we often ignore their importance. We fail to take these signals into account and tend to take a communication at face value. If we are busy or distracted, it's just easier to hear words than to listen to the real meaning of someone's message. Hearing the real message takes more effort, and many times people don't bother to pay close attention. But a good investment in better listening early in a communication can eliminate many misunderstandings—misunderstandings and mistakes that cost you time and money.

Tone of Voice

People generally understand the meaning of many nuances of voice tone. A louder than normal volume indicates anger, excitement, or stress. A lower volume, especially with rising intonation at the ends of sentences, usually means uncertainty, timidity, or fear, while a soft volume with lower intonation at the ends of sentences may indicate a depressed mood. Rapid speech means excitement or "I'm in a hurry," and slow speech indicates worry, fatigue, or depression. Pacing of speech is also an individual habit, partially influenced by geographic region. Speaking in a monotone with no rise and fall in volume is usually indicative of boredom or low energy level.

As with body language, the problem with voice tone is not that we don't *know* these things. The real problem is that we fail to pay attention to them, respond, and otherwise adjust our behavior according to what we read in another. Because we are busy ourselves, not interested in what another person has to say, or unaccepting of what they are saying, we take their words at face value. In reality, their tone of voice coupled with their body language carried the true message, even if the words were indirect. When we consistently pay attention only to the words, we miss important data that helps us better understand and communicate with others.

Once you learn to know someone you work with, it is easy enough to pick up on subtle changes in tone of voice, and it is essential that you make yourself pay attention to this. A voice tone of worry or anger, for example, should be a wake-up call to the leader to ask more questions or try to offer help. You can learn to use your better listening early before a problem gets bigger.

When nonverbal cues indicate one thing and the words say something else, believe the nonverbals!

Common Ways We Fail to Listen

There are many common barriers that keep us from fully listening to another person. Some of these have to do with our attitudes; some are just bad habits. See if you can spot any of your own mistakes and resolve to be more open in your listening. Regularly using these poor listening methods shows lack of respect for the other person and is one indication you are treating the other like an object rather than like a person.

- Judging: Criticizing or evaluating what is being said. "Well, that was a stupid thing to do." "She's so hypocritical."
  When you judge others, they pick up on that fact and stop talking. If you want further information, don't be the critic.

- Mind reading: "I bet he really doesn't want to do that, so I'd better not suggest it."
  Don't make assumptions about other people's thoughts; ask them.

- Dreaming: Your mind wanders off, based on something their words triggered.
  *If you catch yourself dreaming**, make** yourself come back to listening; ask the speaker to repeat something, if necessary.*

- Advising: "I know just what you should do." Some people think they are the expert and try to tell others how to handle the situation. Some genuinely want to help but rush in too fast.
  Let the person talk it out, and often that person will come to his or her own solution, or ask if the person wants your advice before offering it.

- Sparring: Disagreeing with everything; playing devil's advocate. Other people often feel annoyed or put down.
  Speak less and listen more; try to hear people out without challenging them.

- Rehearsing: "Yeah, I remember the time I…" All you want the speaker to do is finish talking so you can say what you want to say!
  Taking the focus off the person who was speaking makes that person feel like he/she was not really worth listening to.

- Patronizing/placating: "Oh, it's not so bad…" "There now, stop your moaning…" This is a good example of treating people like objects; patronizing prevents good listening.
  Providing a one-size-fits-all response or minimizing their concerns is a sure way to get people not to come to you again.

- Being right: "I told you so." You may twist things, yell, or make excuses just to be right. If you were right, keep it quiet.
  Nobody appreciates a know-it-all, and nobody will come to you with ideas or issues.

- Joking: Humor, used to hide your own discomfort.

In the right circumstance, humor can reduce tension, but cracking jokes when someone wants to be serious shows lack of respect for the person and the underlying message.

The Right Way to Listen

Now that you have considered the above things you should *not* to do while listening, here are some things you *should* do to improve your listening. If a speaker's body language gives the listener clues, the reverse is also true. In other words, your nonverbal signals as you listen let the speaker know whether you are really listening. Here's how to listen well and show the person that you are treating them like a person, not an object:

- Always put down your papers or pen, move away from the computer screen or whatever you were doing, ignore the telephone, and *pay attention.* Multitasking usually means you are not giving any one task your best. Speakers do not feel heard when a listener is distracted. Pause your other activities, and you can deal with the person faster.

- Always face the speaker squarely; don't turn away. Observe the person's body language. Sit, if possible, and ask the speaker to sit. Studies show that, when in serious conversation, two minutes sitting feels equal to five minutes standing.

- Concentrate, focus, and use your eyes as well as your ears. Give good eye contact. The speaker should feel like they have your undivided attention. Listening is not a passive activity; it is hard work!

- Do not talk. The words "listen" and "silent" are composed of the same letters. Use this fact as a reminder to be silent as you listen.

- Let the speaker know you are listening. You can nod your head, or without actually "talking," you can add a one- or two-syllable "Uh-huh," "Hmm," or "Okay." Use these sparingly. If you pepper your listening with these expressions, it makes the speaker think you want them to finish quickly so you can talk.

- If you do not have enough time to fully "listen," make the person an offer: "I really want to hear you out on this, but I only have 10 minutes before my meeting. If we don't finish in that time, we'll schedule another time to get back together." Give undivided attention for those minutes, and most times another meeting won't be needed.

- When an employee gives out hints about an issue, don't ignore those hints. They are often testing to see if you are interested enough to ask more.

- Except for negative emotions (anger, depression, worry), try to match your face and your body to the speaker's. If they are leaning forward, lean forward slightly yourself. If they are smiling, relax your face or smile back.

- When you encounter negative emotions such as anger or worry, adopt a posture and an attitude of calm and seriousness. It may help you to take a deep breath so you can stay in control yourself.

- You may wish to begin a listening session by asking an open-ended question (one that cannot be answered with a yes/no or other one-word answer). If the speaker still does not say much, you can say, "Tell me more," "What do you mean?" or a similar phrase to encourage them to open up more.

Good listening makes the other feel valued. This is one of your most important responsibilities in your leadership role—to help others feel important, as if what they are doing matters. When a team member or peer feels valued, he or she contributes value. Listening is a vital key to improving any relationship. Good listening is an indicator to another that you consider them a person—*a person who is worth listening to*, not an object. An improved relationship based on good listening and communication increases employee willingness, raises performance, and thus enhances productivity.

Active Listening: Advanced Listening Skills

Active listening is much more than passive, half-hearted hearing, and it's even more than the basic listening described above. It requires the listener to make a real investment in the interaction, paying full attention and listening for what's not said as well as what is said. Active listening requires actually responding to and verbalizing the emotion or mood of the speaker. The goal of active listening is getting the speaker to reveal what's really going on.

The basic listening tips covered in the previous section are things you should try to practice in every interaction, for the sake of smooth communications and strong relationships. The skills of active listening, which require you to go even further, are skills you may not need to use in every interaction. For leaders, though, they are skills you must possess in order to use when needed. In addition, active listening skills are valuable in your personal life as well.

Each of the active listening skills listed below is built upon the basic listening skills in the previous section, so it's important not to cut out any of the basics! Now we will discuss how to take listening one step further. The more often you practice the items outlined below, the easier they will become and the less likely that miscommunication will be a problem in your life. Challenge yourself to try this, even if it is uncomfortable at first. You may want to try it out at home first. Be subtle. See if you can actively listen without the other person getting suspicious. If they notice a difference and ask you, tell them simply that you are trying to practice better listening. You won't get better without practice.

The first thing to remember is:

- Intention – You have to approach the listening situation with the attitude that you *want* to understand. It's easy to close our minds, hearts, and ears to difficult or emotional people because they test our skills and patience. It's especially important that we make ourselves keep an open mind and intend to listen carefully in cases like these. If we do not, these people will continue to be difficult.

  Remind yourself you *are* going to listen. If someone approaches you at an impossible time, be honest with the person and arrange for another time to sit down together when you can truly listen.

Use basic listening:

- Attention – Give your full attention.

- Silence – Say nothing! Be quiet and let them talk.

- Acknowledge the speaker – Let the speaker know you are listening with a nod or something similar and good eye contact.

Active listening adds the following additional behaviors:

- Probe – Ask open-ended questions. Open-ended questions help you gather information but keep the speaker from feeling interrogated. Especially use questions that begin with "how," "what," or "why." As they talk something out with a good listener, often the speaker's own thoughts, feelings, and actions become clear to them without the listener having to say or do much at all. They may figure it out all by themselves. Do not be quick to jump in with answers or feel like you even have to have advice or an answer, but question and support the person to help them figure it out on their own.

- Paraphrase or summarize – Repeat back a condensed version of what they said in your own words. "In other words…" "So basically what happened was…" This is a very important skill because it helps the speaker know you were listening, and it helps you as a listener to know that you got the intended message. Don't worry that you have to get it exactly right! Part of what you are doing with a paraphrase is trying to stay with the speaker by checking out your level of understanding. If your interpretation is wrong, paraphrasing will give him/her a chance to clarify in case you misunderstood some of it. It is the fact that you *tried* to paraphrase that is important.

  Another good time to use paraphrasing is to check out your own level of understanding if there is some action needed on your part. This can be a particularly useful communication tool when the boss (or your spouse!) expects some kind of action. Paraphrasing helps clarify what's needed and makes sure you and the other person have the same understanding of the situation.

- Show empathy – Identify the mood or feeling the speaker is conveying with his or her message. Again, this is a crucial skill. This means you should quickly sift through your own storehouse of experiences to recall a time you may have felt similarly. Let them know you understand not just the words, but how they feel. You can pick up information about this from their nonverbal cues. "It sounds like you are pretty angry." "I can tell you are worried about this." The value of empathy is that it will keep the speaker talking, help them get it off their chest, and possibly help them figure out what to do. It also builds a great deal of additional trust in the leader.

A leader should always keep confidences. Do not reveal what an employee tells you to anyone unless you have asked and received their permission to discuss it.

Active Listening: When and Why

As mentioned earlier, good basic listening is needed in every interaction; work on your listening habits, and you can easily fit careful and focused listening into your schedule. You should also regularly use paraphrasing and probing to help you better clarify a speaker's meaning.

You may be managing people who are reluctant to speak up about individual concerns. You may have a "gut feeling" that there is something with a person but he or she is reluctant to discuss it. This is when it's particularly important that you probe, show interest, and use silence. This will offer encouragement to the person and show that you really want to hear their concerns. They may continue to be reluctant at first to speak up, but if you continue with these important behaviors—offering them opportunities to say what's bothering them—they may eventually speak up. When they do, this gives you the chance to show empathy and be supportive and encouraging. This builds commitment and loyalty, far beyond what you can buy with raises and bonuses.

If an employee is obviously emotional—angry, worried, upset, or even very happy—this is an important time to use an empathy response. Their concern may involve a work related problem or a personal one. If an employee comes to you again and again for the same basic reason or complaint, this is another clue that empathy is needed. The reason the employee keeps coming back again and again is that he or she did not feel "heard" the first time. When you realize it's a repeat performance, actively listen to see if you can find out what is really going on. You can also probe: "This has come up several times, so I'm wondering what's really going on here. I think there is more to it—some deeper concern that you have."

No one expects you to be everyone's therapist, priest, or most trusted advisor. Many times a good listener is the only thing you really need to be. Simply showing your employee or colleague that you are interested and that you care may satisfy them completely. The employee does not, realistically, expect you to "solve" his or her problem. Some other examples you may encounter would be an employee who has just learned that factors beyond their control have pulled the rug out from under their major project. Or the difficulty may be more personal: they have just found out they have a serious illness or their significant other has just moved out. These are the things that call for active listening skills on the part of the leader. You can't solve these problems, and your employee does not expect you to. However, showing your support by being willing to take a little time to let them talk things out may be all that's needed for them to gain enough focus that they can get back to work.

However, active listening using empathy is not something you can do in five minutes or less. It takes time to listen to someone in this way. With all the responsibilities you have as a leader, you may be wondering when in the world you would ever find time for or have the need to use active listening. Situations that call for true active listening can be challenging. These situations may not come up every day and perhaps not even every week. When they do, however, you need to make the time. Spending this kind of time with someone when needed is time well invested, from the standpoint of being a decent leader and human being who treats someone like a person. In addition, it invites outstanding performance from the person you listened to. What is the connection?

The bottom line is that if you listen deeply and compassionately to another person, you strengthen your relationship with them. This means you improve their readiness level significantly. They reward you with loyalty, commitment, and motivation. It's a good investment of your time, because in tough situations active listening dramatically builds trust and improves long-term performance. It may take a little while for an individual to return to their usual level of performance if they have a significant problem, but they will never forget you and your support. A few opportunities to express true empathy to an employee or co-worker may be all you need to move him or her to a higher performance level. ***Creating employees you can really depend on, knowing the job will be done and done well, is one of your most important roles as a leader.*** Active listening helps you get there in a big way.

Points to Remember about Empathy

<u>It's important that you try to put yourself in the other person's shoes</u>.
If the situation had happened to you, how would you be feeling? Or when similar things have occurred in your own life, what was it like you for? All you are trying to do is *understand* where the person is coming from; it doesn't mean you would feel exactly as they do.

<u>Showing empathy does **not** mean you agree with someone</u>.
Perhaps if you had been in their situation, you truly might have felt differently. You may be tempted to think, "So what's the big deal?" But if you convey this kind of an attitude toward the speaker, this leaves the speaker with the impression that their feelings are "wrong." Feelings are always valid from the perception of the person with the feelings, and telling someone they shouldn't feel that way is *not* good listening. It will undermine the level of trust your employee has for you.

<u>Do not tell your own story when listening</u>.

When you are listening actively, do not make the mistake of giving a long and involved account of the time when you were in a similar situation. Some people have the mistaken impression that this is what the speaker wants to hear. But when you do this, it takes the focus *off* the speaker's problem and puts it back on you, the leader. *A little self-disclosure can be good in this kind of situation, but make sure you offer no more than a sentence or two and then bring the conversation back to the speaker's situation*: "I had something similar on my last job, and I got pretty upset about it until we worked out the details. So I can understand why you are upset now."

Do not feel pressured to "have the right answer" when listening.
The employee will often figure out the situation for themselves. Encourage the employee to be more competent and confident by asking them, "What do you think is the best thing for you to do now?" This will encourage the employee to think about solutions and move them toward action. This approach is better than giving them an answer.

Additional Tips About Using Empathy

As mentioned above, if someone has confided something significant, telling the person exactly what you think they should do is not a good idea. Empathy does not mean "advice." For one thing, if you offer advice, they follow your advice and it does not work out, they may be resentful. For another thing, if they follow your advice and it works, what they have learned is that they can come to you, and you will tell them what to do. You do not want to encourage dependency.

When you have deeply and actively listened to someone and heard their story, there are two good ways you can help them without solving their problem:

- Ask them whether they want your opinion or whether they just wanted to get it off their chest. If it is the latter, be supportive and let them go on their way. They just needed a little kindness and attention. If they say they want your advice ("What should I do?" or "What would you do?"), do not fall into this trap. Turn their question back around to them and say, "What have you thought about doing?" or "Let's think about what your choices are." It's important to let them come up with the ideas for possible solutions. The best role you can play is to help them clarify what their choices are, and then let them make the decision. Be sure it's clear you are not telling them what to do. The decision must be their own.

- You can offer to help connect them with the assistance they need. Do you have an Employee Assistance Program (EAP)? Do you have a Human Resources office to refer them to? If it's a personal problem, at the very least, can you get out the phone book and help them look for a lawyer, a financial advisor, a therapist, a minister, or whatever type of person they need? You can point them in the right direction, but they need to make the move. If it's an organizational issue, get their permission to talk to people about the problem so you can help uncover an answer. Be sure you get back to them later with what you found.

Getting People to Hear You Through Careful Speaking

Listening skills are essential to communication, but they are only half the issue. Conversations and relationships require that we shift roles back and forth, in a smooth process, from speaker to listener. It's not enough for the leader to be good at only the listening part of the process. Being a good communicator means being a good speaker as well. When you speak, you want to convey the meaning and intent of your message so you and the listener have the same understanding. To speak well, you must use your nonverbal communication (voice tone and body language), carefully select your words, and check to make sure the listener gets the message.

We can use many different words or phrases to convey the same general idea, but when we combine our chosen words with our nonverbal communications, the result can be a message that is very insignificant and almost unnoticed or it can be an overpowering message.

Many people are most familiar with these two extreme tones or moods of conveying a message: being passive or being aggressive. But let's examine how this appears when a leader uses either of these extremes to convey a message to an employee.

- <u>Passive communicating</u>: At this extreme, the leader either fails to take a stand and take action or agrees with the other person and lets them have their way. What this communicates to the other is that they can do whatever they please. Passive body language and weak, quiet tone of voice say the leader is disinterested, uncertain, defeated, or does not have the confidence to speak up. Such behavior in a leader means he or she is not in charge. It's difficult for others to have confidence and willingly follow such a person, regardless of the person's title.

  A passive leader lets things happen, is unable to take a stand, gets walked on, or lets some people get away with things they shouldn't. The leader may feel out of control, uncertain, or victimized. **Passive leadership causes resentment and uncertainty among followers.** People have little respect for a leader who cannot make decisions and lets himself or herself be walked on.

- <u>Aggressive communicating</u>: In contrast to the above, this is the completely opposite extreme in which the leader is pushy and runs over others. He/she may not even be aware of this, but "doing it my way" is the powerful message that is communicated loudly and clearly to others. The body language of aggression is tense and even threatening. The tone of voice is loud, demanding, and leaves no room for discussion.

  An aggressive leader issues orders and doesn't really care if others like it or not or if he/she perceives a lack of respect. **Aggressive leadership causes anger and resentment among followers.** People do not like to be talked down to or ordered around. This is an old and ineffective style of leadership that simply doesn't work anymore, if it ever did. Aggressive communications may get others to comply when the leader is present, but the minute the leader is out of sight, people will do as they please.

If both of the above types of communication cause resentment among followers, how should the leader convey a message?

Balanced Communication: Being Assertive

Many people do not fully understand that there is a middle ground. It's called **assertive communicating.** You don't have to choose between the extremes described in the previous section. The best leaders speak their mind but don't raise their voice. They speak with authority, clarity, and tact, and are mindful of the feelings and concerns of others. They speak up, but they don't "talk down to" others. They do not always assume they are right and others are wrong. A good leader talks "with" others. This is the type of communication that results from treating people with respect.

Speaking assertively means being direct and honest—saying what's on your mind but in a way that does not hurt other people or put them on the defensive. The body language and tone of voice are respectful and open to the give-and-take of equals. **Assertive leadership results in good relationships and increased productivity.** It shows others respect, and they work hard for such a leader. This type of communication is one of the most basic common traits that outstanding leaders have in common.

When your employee is not doing a task as you would like, you can simply let it ride, hoping it will get better, or give them the cold shoulder, hoping they will get the idea. However, this is passive communication and will rarely be effective in getting them to change. You could also say, "You're doing it all wrong! What is wrong with you, anyway?!" But this is an example of aggressive communication and treats the person like an object. It demeans the employee and may make him or her angry. An example of an assertive message in this case is: "This is not really what I had in mind, Mike. Can you try it like this next time instead?" An assertive statement gets the point across with less likelihood the employee will be angry and try to get back at the leader. Assertive communications convey an accurate meaning in a way that preserves the relationship between the leader and the employee.

Using "I" Messages

One important way of communicating assertively is to use what are called *"I" messages.* These are statements the speaker makes that begin with "I think…," "I feel…," and "I believe…." Instead of accusing others or jumping to conclusions, such statements leave the door open to adult communications between equals. Rather than putting the other on the defensive, the speaker is "owning" his/her thoughts and feelings. If someone came to you with one of the following statements, how would you react?

1. "You make me so mad when you don't get the information to me on time." OR:

"I get nervous when I don't have what I need to complete my work on time."

2. "You've got it all wrong—that's not the way we need to do it!" OR:
"I don't agree with you on this. I think we should…"

Both of the above pairs of sentences convey a similar message that some behavior is not acceptable. In the first sentence of each pair, however, you would probably get angry or try to defend yourself if someone said that to you because you are being attacked. This results in possible conflict because what's said is more of an aggressive statement than an assertive one. In the second sentence of each pair, you are less likely to feel threatened and would probably engage in dialogue if someone said that to you. In the second sentence of each pair, the speaker is assertive and said what is on his/her mind without attacking the other person.

Tips for Building an Assertive Message

Assertive communication is the best way to get your needs met without causing long-term damage to the relationship by running over others. To deliver a serious message assertively requires a number of the same skills we discussed in the context of good listening. So both aspects of communication are based on many of the same behaviors.

- Face the listener directly to deliver your message.
- Look the person in the eye.
- Keep a serious and moderate tone of voice.
- Maintain a relaxed and calm posture.
- Choose words that are direct and honest—don't beat around the bush, just say it.
- Give the message straight from your heart—believe in what you are saying.
- Don't attack the person.
- Use "I" messages. Do not blame others; claim responsibility for your own thoughts and actions. Say, "I think," "I believe," "I feel," "What we/I probably should do is…"

Choosing Your Words Carefully—Clear Message Format

When you want to convey an important message, it is a good idea to give some serious thought to your wording before you say it. Keep your words as simple and direct as possible. It may even help to write the words down, as good speakers often do. This is a way of practicing what you want to say. Any time you need to initiate a difficult conversation, write out some sentences or phrases you want to use and rehearse how to say them. This will help you to choose words and body language that are not too passive or too aggressive. Especially sticky are those communications where the leader has to address some problematic behavior. We will further discuss confrontation later in this course.

The *clear message format* is an effective formula for helping you choose your words carefully. Misunderstanding is less likely to occur in difficult situations in which the speaker (1) offers specific details about the issue, (2) presents the leader's interpretation of the situation, (3) shows empathy, and (4) offers a bridging statement that invites the other person into a discussion. This formula will be effective whether you are dealing with an interpersonal situation or conveying new information.

1. Specific details – information that explains exactly what you observed or heard, not just hearsay.
    a) "Yesterday I saw you arguing with Tony, and today you have been distracted and less productive
    b) "We just got word that we will no longer be using Acme as a supplier."

2. Your interpretation – what you think your observations mean. This is based on your past experience and knowledge, your assumptions, or even your mood.
    a) "Since you don't lose your temper often, I wonder if something pretty upsetting happened with Tony."
    b) "Apparently, we were unable to agree on a price we could afford."

3. Empathy – a statement of how you believe the other person is feeling to let them know you understand, or a statement of your own feelings.
    a) "You may still be angry and carrying a grudge over this."
    b) "I know some of you may be upset about this because their products are the best to work with."

4. Bridging statement – tosses the conversation it back to the listener. The speaker needs to consider the possibility that his/her interpretation may be wrong. A bridging statement invites the other person into the conversation by asking for a response, reaction, or explanation.
    a) "Help me out here and tell me what's going on with you."
    b) "Can I count on all of you to make this work out?"

More Examples of Clear Message Format

"I'm really grateful [feeling] to you for speaking up for me in front of the boss yesterday [details]. I know that took some guts [interpretation]. Knowing that you're behind me gives me confidence, and I appreciate your support [bridging]."

"When you didn't call yesterday after you said you would [details], I thought you were mad at me [interpretation] after our disagreement in the meeting. I've been thinking about it ever since, and I'm worried [feeling]. I'd like to know if you are still upset with me [bridging]."

"I've asked you twice for the March sales figures [details]. I'm getting the idea that you've been avoiding me [interpretation], and I'm concerned about it [feeling]. I would like us to clear this up now so I will know what I to expect. Help me understand what's going on [bridging]."

A Time and a Place for Everything

Using assertive body language, voice tone, and words that are clear and direct are highly effective techniques in virtually all workplace and personal interactions. Being assertive is respectful and professional because it treats the other person as an equal. In the same way that assertive communication works well with your employees, peers, and family, it also works well with your boss and other decision-makers.

Do not be afraid to speak up with those in positions of authority. When you do so, always offer your comments in a respectful, assertive tone with the goal of being helpful, not critical. Good bosses want you to speak up. Clients, public officials, and other stakeholders need to hear your opinion. People are more likely to listen to and consider your opinion if you present it assertively rather than aggressively.

Whenever you have something serious to say, it's also a good idea to choose your timing. Be sure the person or people who need to hear the message are able to give their full attention. Unless it is an emergency, do not, for example, deliver your message when the person is already overloaded or upset about some other issue.

Be sure you deliver private messages, such as negative comments or a confrontation, privately and not in front of others. Few things are more humiliating to a person than having their boss or anyone else give them a severe scolding in front of their peers. Find a private place and time, and remember to say what needs to be said without aggression.

Advanced Tips—Putting Speaking and Listening Together

Good communication is built on give-and-take between speaking and listening. When an employee comes to you with an issue, you play the role of listener but also the role of speaker as you ask questions, provide information, and help problem-solve. The ebb and flow of roles from speaker to listener is part of the natural rhythm of conversation and discussion.

It is very important to be able to play both roles well. Assumptions and lack of attention easily disrupt communication and create confusion about the meaning.

1. **Prepare what you want to say.** There will probably be occasions as a leader when you may be afraid you will lose your temper (communicate aggressively) or won't have the courage to speak up (communicate passively). In these situations, it is especially helpful to *practice ahead of time what you will say and how you will say it.* Write down some thoughts or say them in your head a few times. You will be much more likely to remain assertive when you are prepared. Being prepared will help keep you in the middle, so you do not revert to either extreme of being intimidated or issuing orders.

2. **Avoid one-way communication.** After making your point as a speaker, it is important to *get the other person involved in dialogue* in order to encourage two-way

conversation, mutual understanding, and problem-solving. Ask questions to get the other person involved. Say what you need to say, then be quiet and listen. Assertive communication is two-way. When the message becomes one-way only and feels like a lecture, this is an aggressive communication and should be avoided.

3. **Check for understanding.** When you are a speaker delivering instructions or an important message, you should *check the level of understanding of the listener*. Ask the listener to repeat what he/she thinks you said. "I know I may not always make myself clear, so tell me what you heard in case I need to clarify," is a good way to do this. This will encourage others to be better listeners and will help you, as a leader, to be sure they have correctly understood. You can also end your messages with open-ended questions to encourage dialogue and elicit questions from the other person. This will help you avoid problems later, such as a listener going off and doing the wrong thing with the excuse, "But I thought you said…"

4. **Be careful about terminology and jargon.** Be as clear and precise as possible with the words you use. The clear message format can help. Use language and terms the listener understands.

5. **Be mindful of your own body language.** In the same way that you notice others' body language to better understand their message, others notice your body language and tone of voice. Use your body language to support your words and convey the general "feeling" that you intend to convey.

6. **Use silence to listen carefully.** Silence is important as you move from speaker to listener, as we have discussed. Do not dominate the conversation, but allow the other person a chance to express their thoughts or to ask questions. Each of us has two ears and one mouth. If we listen twice as much as we talk, we will gain a better understanding and more easily create shared meaning. This shows a fundamental level of respect and shows the other they are being viewed as a person, not an object.

7. **Follow up.** If you have given spoken (or even written) instructions, check back with your listener later to be sure things are going as you expected. Make any needed clarifications.

Remember that the more you practice this type of communicating, the easier it becomes. You will be less likely to give in to bursts of temper that often do damage to delicate relationships, and you will be less likely to be taken advantage of by others when they learn you will stand up and make decisions. In addition, you will be sure your listener received the correct message by engaging in good dialogue.

Giving Out Information

As noted earlier, one of the chief complaints of employees is that there is not enough communication in their organizations. Many workers feel frustrated because they often have so little information on what is going on, decisions that are made, and so little opportunity to have a voice in helping to shape their workplaces. This is why frequent communication is so important: it shows respect for employees. When they feel respected they contribute more.

If you are somewhere in the middle of a larger organization, you may even feel the same frustration that your employees express. If information is not freely exchanged in your organization, it's important for you to make a commitment to be as open as you possibly can with your own employees about things that are happening in the organization that you are aware of. Unless you have been specifically told *not* to share certain information, you should inform your people promptly.

Sometimes people withhold information because of the view that they are retaining power and influence by doing so. This is, in fact, the exact opposite of what really happens. Withholding information shows concern only for oneself and disrespect for others and for the organization as a whole. Instead of becoming more important and influential, people quickly learn that the withholder is an obstacle. Others, then, act in similar ways and withhold information from the person who is an obstacle, and the communication flow breaks down.

Part of your role is to be the conduit of information. Let employees know by your actions and your words that you pass on information as soon as you have it and that they can come to you with questions any time. If you do not have an answer, you will try to find out for them. If you adopt an open attitude, you will find that fewer of your people have complaints about being uninformed. Encourage your boss and others to do the same for you—share information with you as soon as they receive it, so you have as much knowledge as possible to do your job well.

The Leader as Coach

Good leadership can be compared with coaching a sport. A coach works not only to build individual players, but to build a team into one unit. A team is a group of individuals who know each other's strengths and each other's roles, rely on each other, help each other out, and conform their own effort to fit the overall goal. Teammates on good teams trust each other and know they can only accomplish their goal when they work well together.

What the Coach Does

- The coach develops a game plan and expectations—but allows for input from the team. Last-minute changes can be made by the players when the situation dictates; they have to use their best judgment.

- The coach provides feedback on what needs to be improved and teaches new skills to individual members and to the group.

- The coach develops challenges and sets high standards to encourage the team to go beyond their current level.

- The coach provides encouragement to keep the team going when they are discouraged or losing the game.

- The coach coordinates arrangements, making sure that all resources are available and that plans are clearly communicated.

The Old Model of Leadership: The Dictator or Autocrat

"The coach" is a newer model of leadership that has emerged from changes in the world and the workplace in recent years. The responsibilities of coaches, described above, are applicable to good leaders. Contrast the coaching model with the example of a dictator or autocrat. The autocrat makes all decisions and issues orders, and followers obey out of fear. Deficiencies are unacceptable, and punishment is swift and severe. Followers never try anything new for fear it will not work out and will result in their demise. No two-way communication is allowed in a dictatorship, unless the follower is specifically asked to provide information.

The dictator model is the old way that many organizations of the mid-twentieth century and earlier were operated. Managers did the planning, organizing, directing, and controlling. Some organizations were not as ruthless as described in the preceding paragraph. Some were, in fact, benevolent dictatorships that tried to take into account the followers' best interests. But even then, control was highly centralized, and conformity was expected.

Marginal productivity and foreign competition caused many organizations in developed countries to question the fundamental assumptions of the command and control model. It became clear that autocratic leadership with one-way communication failed to produce high-level output and keep such organizations competitive.

The New Model of Leadership

By the later part of the twentieth century, a new model of leadership had emerged. This model is the preferred type of leadership in the twenty-first century and is based on the skills being presented in this course. Because people at all levels are involved, work output from this type of leadership is far better than from the autocratic leader which emphasizes the roles of "boss" and "subordinate."

With the newer, more effective model of leadership, the coaching model, organizations are built around "teams" with leaders who "coach." Instead of planning, organizing, directing, and controlling the followers, the new leader's duties include **enabling, encouraging, coordinating, and facilitating**. *Planning* continues to be an important function of leadership, but planning is increasingly done with the participation of the followers. In fact, all the new roles of the leader involve a much higher degree of employee participation than was generally found in the organization of the past.

Savvy organizations have learned that tapping in to employee wisdom positively impacts the bottom line. No one person has all the answers, but by working together teams can collectively develop the best possible solutions.

Under the old model, employees seldom received feedback, and when they did, it was in the form of corrective action or criticism. Such criticism may or may not have included instruction on how to do it better. And if no criticism was forthcoming … well, “No news is good news.” But does any player or any team continue to get better if they do not receive feedback on what they are doing well and what they can improve? Certainly not. The autocratic manager is unable to promote continuous improvement, motivation, and outstanding performance. The coach manager can.

To improve the performance of a team, then, a coach must provide constant feedback so players know how to change their behavior. So it is with the leader of today.

What Is Feedback?

Perhaps you have had the experience of being on a new job and wondering how you were doing. No one said anything, so you concluded you must be doing okay because no one complained. But you would have been less hesitant and performed more enthusiastically if someone had said to you, “You’re doing a great job on Task A. Task B would probably be better if you did thus and so…” Honest comments on their performance give people pride, confidence, and motivation, and in areas where improvement is still needed, feedback gives them a target to reach for, too. People want to know how they are doing. If they aren’t doing something right, they would rather know what’s wrong and how to fix it than wonder.

Feedback, in some organizations, has become synonymous with criticism. When it is used correctly, however, criticism is not what feedback is at all. Criticism aimed in “putting another in their place” is an aggressive and inappropriate use of position power. Instead, feedback should be delivered in an assertive manner. The purpose behind feedback is to be helpful. Feedback should be primarily positive. If leaders find things to compliment their employees on, employees will learn rapidly and will also develop stronger relationship bonds with the leader—an essential factor in improving their performance, as we have learned. If you say, “Good” or “That’s right,” especially as someone is learning, and offer frequent thanks and encouragement, you promote more of those actions you notice favorably. Some of the negative performance will take care of itself as the employee learns to do things right.

How to Offer Feedback

Good feedback is of two related types:

- Positive comments on things the employee is already doing right—this is positive feedback, as explained above.

- Helpful repetition of instruction and suggestions for things that need improvement—this is constructive or corrective feedback.

"Helpful instruction" and "suggestions for improvement" are constructive feedback. This approach is very different from criticism. "You are doing really well with X, and here's how you could improve on Y. I know you want to do a good job, so I thought you'd want to know," is constructive feedback. The intent is to help the employee. By contrast, "I've told you before that you are doing Y wrong, and you need to work on this right away!" is a criticism. It is said in frustration, lets the employee know who is boss, and clearly tells them to shape up. It is offered in a way that treats the other like an object, not a person.

When you need to give an employee correction on a behavior, do so with a helpful or compassionate attitude and tone of voice. Be careful to ask yourself what your goal is. If your goal is truly to have a well-functioning department or project team and get everyone motivated and working together, your reason for delivering corrective suggestions is to be helpful. Your reason is not to be demeaning of the employee or to "put him in his place." If your reasons are less about being helpful and more about being punishing, you need to rethink the wisdom of your approach. Go back to the beginning of this course and read the first few pages again to review!

When you are harsh and deliver your corrective feedback aggressively, this is taken as criticism; even if it's true, it's insulting to your employee. Harsh words spoken in anger can never be completely recalled. An apology helps but it doesn't erase the words. Criticism will damage the relationship you have with the employee and damage his or her motivation. The next time, the employee may be less likely to comply, to move ahead with confidence on a task, or to pitch in when the chips are down. What you want to do is fix the *behavior* and at the same time keep a motivated worker. Any corrective feedback that you offer will do less damage when it is laid on a base of previous positive feedback.

A good rule of thumb is to use three times as much positive feedback as constructive feedback—and some sources say ten times as much! There can seldom be too much positive feedback, but there is often too little.

F.A.S.T. Feedback

Providing feedback is one of your most important functions as a leader. Remember the word "FAST" as the guideline for how to deliver feedback:

F = Frequent. Feedback should be given to each employee *frequently*, not just once a year or at performance review time. This builds employee loyalty. The newer the employee or the more uncertain he/she is, the more frequently feedback is necessary. With brand-new employees, feedback once or more daily is appropriate. Don't take seasoned employees for granted, either. Remember to compliment them each week or two and anytime they have done something extra.

A = Accurate. Don't say an employee is doing well if he or she is not. Be honest about shortcomings without belittling the employee. People want to know if they aren't doing things correctly. You must discuss any problems very early, while they are still easy to correct and before they become habitual or get bigger.

S = Specific. Rather than using a generalization ("You did a great job") and repeating that generic sentence to each person down the line, be as specific and personal as possible: "I appreciate your extra work on that Hastings presentation. That was well done, and I'm sure the customer will be pleased."

T = Timely. Choose your timing. Pick a time when the employee is able to listen. Provide positive and constructive feedback as quickly as possible after the behavior, and don't deliver feedback—especially constructive feedback—in the presence of other people.

No Punishment Needed When You Emphasize the Positive

Punishment is any type of negative consequence that follows a behavior. The stated purpose of punishment is to get someone to reduce or stop a behavior. Criticism is a form of punishment. Most organizations use far too much of this kind of consequence. Punishment tends to prevent the occurrence of an action temporarily, but punishing consequences are less effective in changing behavior over the long run than positive or rewarding feedback. Rather than punishing the behaviors you don't want, try rewarding behaviors you do want.

Employees often either resent or are demoralized by punishment and may, in fact, show worse performance or be more disruptive after being punished than before. Punishment also reduces the trust and the positive relationship the leader is building with the follower. Another difficulty with punishment is that it shows a person what *not* to do but may not show them what *to* do. Undesirable behavior may be reduced in the short term, but the long-term results of punishment are not effective in accomplishing the desired outcome.

We previously discussed the importance of using rewards to improve performance. Rewards, or positive consequences, work much better than negative ones to change people's behavior in the desired direction. Positive feedback causes people to do *more* of the behavior. Look for something your employees are doing *right* and focus on that. They will, then, be inclined to do even more of that desirable behavior, improving both their performance and their motivation.

Using feedback and positive consequences will develop the employee's behavior in the desired direction, and punishment or harsh discipline will seldom be needed. The work environment will be more enjoyable for you and for those who report to you.

Coaching: Performance Feedback Sessions

You may have heard about "coaching" before you began this course. It has become a popular process by which people learn to improve job performance and personal satisfaction. Coaching can be used for many purposes, such as career advancement, personal growth, or skill development. In this course, it is the word that describes individual feedback sessions a leader conducts with employees. Sometimes the coach can be an outsider whose fee is paid by the company or by the person being coached. Coaching is, however, a useful internal method for leaders to further develop employees. Such discussions usually focus on project status, goal-setting, performance improvement, and career development.

If you are in charge of a team, a division, or a project, part of your responsibility is to have regular structured conversations with people about their performance. This is coaching. At least quarterly, if not monthly, you should plan to have a simple, informal conversation with each direct report. Schedule a short appointment; 30 minutes is usually enough, and some sessions may take less than 30 minutes.

The very best way to begin such a discussion is with an open-ended question. Ask the person, "How do you think you are doing in terms of your work?" If they are surprised by the question or unclear what you mean (this is entirely possible if you are not in the habit of such discussions), tell them you are planning to have regular performance conversations with people so you and they know where they stand. Ask them to evaluate their own performance on their various projects or roles; this should go beyond just giving you a briefing on the status of their projects.

If they identify concerns, this is the perfect time for you to problem solve with them. This is NOT the time to reprimand them. Give them your opinion of how they have been doing. Find something to acknowledge positively or show appreciation for. If they bring up uncertainties or deficiencies, help them to develop an action plan for what to do to improve in those areas. Give constructive suggestions on anything you think needs improvement. Open up discussion for them to make suggestions or express their concerns on issues of interest as a way of getting their feedback on your leadership.

Even if you have an open-door policy, many of them will not come to you on their own to raise an issue, but while they have your ear in a coaching meeting they will talk. This kind of coaching session shows an employee you have interest in them, and they will reward you with a higher level of performance. In addition, coaching sometimes involves individually teaching them some special skill or offering them subject-matter knowledge that will help them grow and develop. But the essential component of coaching is a discussion of their performance.

Coaching People Who Aren't Your Employees

While it may be easier to do coaching with your direct reports, you can and should apply this same coaching approach to working with people on a cross-functional project team that you are leading. Depending on the length and complexity of the project, you should plan to meet separately with each individual on the team at regular intervals. This is in addition to project team joint meetings. During your individual coaching sessions, ask them the same questions as you asked your direct reports: "How do you think you are doing?" If they are struggling or have not been fulfilling their obligations on the project, this is a time to be frank *while still maintaining a helpful attitude.*

You will have more leverage with them if you do not lose your temper or criticize them. Whether or not they admit poor performance, tell them calmly that you have been disappointed in _____. Explain how this is impacting the project team and the work of other members. Tell them, too, that you'd like to help them get back on track. Encourage them to brainstorm solutions with you that will help them overcome their performance barriers. When you can get their thinking aligned with your purpose, you have an excellent chance of re-engaging this individual contributor. If you push or become aggressive, you will alienate the person and you will have lost your advantage. If you do lose your cool temporarily, stop, collect your wits, apologize, and take a helpful stance again.

What is a Team?

Project teams, leadership teams, departments, business units, work crews, similar collections of people are examples of groups that need to work together effectively in order to achieve the organizational mission and please the customer or end-user. Most organizations have moved toward some degree of team structure, and many of these focus considerable resources on building better internal teamwork. Not all organizations have teams in place and fully functioning. Even some organizations that claim to work in teams really have teams in name only; there is little to no collaborative work. However, the advantages that result from high-functioning teams make strategies and tactics to promote teamwork behavior a worthwhile goal, even if your organization is not officially team-based.

A team is any small group (usually between three and twelve people, although experts differ on size) whose members must interact regularly in order to accomplish a task that one or several of them working alone could not accomplish. The ideal team size is five to nine members. Teams with more ten or twelve people are generally less productive because teamwork is based on small-group dynamics. Large groups do not share the same characteristics, and communication becomes more complex.

Team structure ranges from formal and specific teams to very informal teams. Formal teams have members that are dependent upon one another to complete their work; that is, the members are interdependent. Teams may be within an organizational unit (ex: the Sales Department) or they may be cross-functional (ex: software implementation team) or even multi-organizational (such as the project team, consisting of the contractor, the client, city officials, the engineering firm, and others). The team also needs clearly defined and measurable goals that are understood by all members. Each member of the team needs to understand his or her role in achieving the goal. Team goals should be moderately challenging and be aligned with organizational (or project) goals.

When employees are performing effectively as a team, the output from a team is normally greater than the sum of the individual contributions of each member. Getting to the stage where a group is performing effectively as a team, however, takes time and training. The level of productivity depends largely on group interrelationships. High-functioning or high-performing teams show the following characteristics:

- Knowledge of overriding purpose and self-enforcement of standards.
- Sharing of job duties and helping each other out in critical times.
- Cross-over of skills, allowing for flexibility in coverage and enriched working environments.
- Equality in sacrifice and commitment from each team member.
- Shared decision-making that involves all members through consensus-building.
- Positive confrontation that leads to understanding.
- Members trust and respect each other even when they do not agree.

Stages of Team Development

Teams go through a life cycle; they have predictable stages in their work as a unit. Knowing what stage of team development your group is in is based on understanding how well they implement teamwork concepts: how well they share information and workloads; how well they work out systems between them, including working out conflicts; how much they believe themselves to be a unit; how easily and smoothly work processes flow between them; and to what degree they can monitor their collective performance.

1. Forming Stage. At this stage you may be considering moving to a team-based system or you may be currently getting people organized to begin working as a team. In either case, the readiness level of such a group to function well as a team is quite low, even if one or more are outstanding individual contributors. They require considerable instruction and direction on the joint task and goals. They also require considerable one-on-one communication, resources, support, and encouraging actions on the part of the leader. It's important to spend time at this stage clarifying why you are forming the team, what a team is, what the benefits will be of working as a team, and what the ground rules are. Patience is required at this stage in overcoming resistance because team cohesiveness is low. Although team members may know their individual jobs, they do not know each other well nor how to work as a team.

2. Storming Stage. At this point, the group has been together for a relatively short time as a "team." Members may be vying for positions; there is often considerable arguing about the best ways to accomplish goals; and team members may challenge the rules and the leader in a number of ways. The leader must continue instruction, secure additional training and resources, provide direction, as well as encourage and support individual team members and the team as a whole.

3. Norming Stage. The hallmark of this stage is that the team has begun to come together and take more initiative. Members understand and agree with the rules. They have more of a shared understanding of the goals. Performance is beginning to improve, and the team is moving towards taking on additional responsibility. It still needs relationship-building behaviors, particularly coaching, from the leader. The leader needs to model respect and trust for members.

4. Performing Stage. Finally, many teams get to the point where their collective output is considerably higher than the sum of their individual contributions would be. The team may be able to take on day-to-day responsibilities and decisions, solve problems, and generally engage in some degree of self-management. Other teams in the latter phases of their work together may turn in acceptable output but never perform with the synergy of a high-performing team.

   With teams at this stage, even the highest-performing ones, the leader must remain available for consultation. The less self-directed they are, the more the leader's involvement (instruction, inspiration, and encouragement) will be needed. Teams with the opportunity to collaborate over a period of time have the opportunity to raise their level of performance. Periodic discussion of their collective performance and setting of new goals will encourage continuous improvement.

Task Behaviors a Leader Can Use to Promote Teamwork

- Instruct and train the group as a whole on specialized skills or expertise.
- Help the team set goals.
- Model appropriate focus and collaboration on goals and objectives.
- Provide inspiration and vision.
- Clarify team roles and accountability.
- Problem-solve with the team for process issues.
- Communicate regularly about tasks, activities, and projects.
- Provide helpful reminders on how to work together, team goals, and organizational mission
- Assist the team to set rules for how members will work together.
- Monitor team results and provide regular feedback discussion on results.
- Hold the team accountable for its collective results.

Relationship Behaviors a Leader Can Use to Promote Teamwork

- Plan team activities that do not directly involve the work, like having a meal together.
- Use group games and humor to promote camaraderie.
- Train the group on small group dynamics.
- Encourage members to talk to each other directly about concerns, not go through the leader.
- Recognize everyone who works for improved teamwork.

- Model respectful communications and self-control in all situations—because people do what you do.
- Be willing to listen and offer encouragement to the team and to individual members.
- Openly share information and encourage employees to do the same.
- Give credit freely for people's ideas and contributions.
- Talk about your team regularly as a "team" to upper management and give them recognition whenever possible.
- Use self-disclosure; be willing to reveal information about yourself so you do not appear distant and difficult for people to trust.

Setting Team Goals

Having shared goals is one essential component of building and maintaining teamwork. Goal setting is a very important activity for a team and must be done in the early stages of team formation. It is difficult for a team to work toward something when they are not clear exactly where they are supposed to be going. Goals must be realistic, however, and should not be too high or too low. Goals that are too low are insulting and will not encourage team members to work up to capacity. Goals that are too high will cause anxiety, discouragement, or anger because they appear hopeless. Avoid either of these extremes so you do not demotivate employees.

How does the leader know what goals to set and when to set them? Leaders do not do this alone. Most organizations and managers provide some guidance, such as information on the organization's overall goals and its past performance, which can help direct your team's goals. Team and individual goals should always be in line with and support organizational goals.

If you are the one in charge in your organization, you still do not have to do goal-setting alone. This is a situation where it's important to bring in key employees, or perhaps all employees. Setting effective goals requires everyone's input. This helps to define goals, so they are high enough but not too high. The leader should call a team meeting and remind everyone of the organization's vision and mission. The team, then, can do its part to develop goals that support the mission and vision by offering input. It's helpful to show the team information on what they have achieved in the past—the past year, or even the past quarter. Ask for suggestions for new goals and get everyone's ideas. Try to work to get consensus on shared goals in order to increase the team's enthusiasm and commitment. Consensus means that everyone can live with the goals, even though some team members may have preferred another goal statement or different priorities.

Three to five goals are normally sufficient for a team. Having too many goals gets confusing and may muddy the waters as you try to set priorities. As you develop the wording of your goals, be as specific as you can about exactly what you will do and the outcomes you desire. "We will work up to full capacity with high quality" is not a clear goal, but "We will produce 8,000 units per week with 100% quality" is better. Goals must be specific enough that the team will know exactly when they have achieved them.

Using specific measures of goals, such as dollars, percentages, units, time, customers served, calls, complaints, or other variables that can be measured or counted will help everyone to know whether the team is on track and has achieved its goals.

If you are in an organization which hands down goals from "on high," or if your team is very inexperienced in working together, you will need to announce the goals to the team. Continue to try to persuade your decision makers to allow your group to set at least some of its own goals. As you demonstrate the desire and the results, you are likely to persuade management that more freedom is warranted. When you set your own goals you typically have more control over them. Your team is more likely to believe in and achieve goals they have helped to shape.

SMART Goals

If you follow the acronym, S.M.A.R.T., you will be able to set appropriate goals for your team and/or for individuals. Goals should be:

- Specific: Goals that are too general are not as motivating as more specific goals: "We want to improve our on-time quality," is not as good as "We will meet deadlines for all phases of the project."
- Measurable: Goals that are measurable help us to know the score and, therefore, know how we can improve the score. If something is measurable, we know when we achieve it.
- Action-oriented: If goals are action-oriented, that means we can identify actions, tasks, or activities that will lead us directly to the goal.
- Realistic: While we want our goals to be challenging, they should not be so lofty that they make us discouraged before we even begin. Getting the right balance here means we should begin with information on where we are currently, and set a goal that causes the team (or individual) to stretch a little.
- Trackable: This means we assign activities to specific people by certain dates, convey that information to all involved, and hold individuals or the team accountable.

It is also a good idea to discuss "why" you want to accomplish each identified goal. Having an understanding of why we are doing this helps keep people motivated. As you develop goals with your team, get the team's feedback on factors that may affect goal attainment. You want to set goals that have a high likelihood of achievement if people work hard and stretch. In the interest of continuous improvement, you will continue to refine these goals over time.

Examples of Goals

Here are some examples of items that are useful in many organizations around which to set goals.

- Units produced or services delivered per day, week, or other timeframe
- Pounds or feet per day

- Sales per week or day
- Sales made/sales attempted
- Reduction of waste
- Number of rejects
- Number of customer complaints
- Amount of rework
- Absenteeism
- Tardiness
- Number of grievances
- Number of suggestions received
- Turnover rate
- Accident rate
- Incident/near-miss rate
- Cost of sales
- Overhead costs
- Cost of inventory
- Amount of overtime

These are examples of areas on which to focus goal-writing, any of which can meet the S.M.A.R.T. test.

Team Roles and Responsibilities

An important part of focusing the team on its task is to make sure everyone knows his or her roles in achieving the goals you set. Take sufficient time to clarify with the team who will be completing which tasks and activities in the team's quest to reach its goals.
If there is a question of overlap or duplication of work by individuals, it is important to clarify who is responsible for what. Conversely, if some tasks fall through the cracks, assign them to an individual follower.

In addition to their individual jobs, there are several important teamwork roles that must be fulfilled. If not, the group cannot function smoothly as a team. These roles must be agreed to early in the team's life cycle.

1. <u>The team needs a facilitator</u>. This is the person who calls and conducts team meetings and sees to it that everyone participates. In the early stages of team formation, this will normally be the team leader. When the team reaches a higher performance level, the role of facilitator can be assigned to another team member to help them develop facilitation skills and more fully empower the team.

   The role of leader in a team environment is to create a place where the team can function with a minimum of barriers. This means the leader needs to secure resources, relay communications to and from higher management, support, encourage, and clarify team activities, promote participation, and let the team function as independently as they are capable of. The leader does not need to look over their shoulders all the time.

If much of this sounds familiar, it's because we have encountered similar ideas when we discussed improving individual employee's capabilities, coaching, and other previous topics in this course. Through your own leadership behaviors and positive attitude, you will continue to improve you employees' level of performance and commitment.

2. The team needs a recorder. This person will prepare an agenda and distribute it ahead of time. Team members know they can notify this person if they have an item to discuss at the next meeting. The recorder also takes minutes of the meeting and distributes these to the team. This serves as a reminder of any action team members are responsible for.

   Minutes should be simple. Don't include full proceedings. Simply list all decisions made and all actions needed. Every action item should designate an owner and a deadline.

3. The team needs an administrative coordinator. Someone needs to take the responsibility for reserving a room for the team meeting. There may also be additional record-keeping or supportive functions in certain teams. The designated administrative coordinator could be the facilitator, the recorder, or another member assigned to this task.

4. The team needs a scheduler. This is the person who assigns work to team members and may schedule team meetings. This role needs to be filled by the team leader in the early stages of team formation. The scheduler may also assist the team leader by serving as a conduit for communications.

5. Depending on your mission and culture, other formal or informal functions may need to be completed. This could include things like: safety rep, humor coordinator, conflict manager, newsletter or progress-report editor, or procurement specialist (for coffee, food and routine supplies).

Ground Rules

The team also needs to establish some ground rules. These are basic operational rules that members commit to in order to work together more smoothly as a unit. The team should be encouraged to develop its own rules through discussion—no more than ten that everyone can live with. Listed below are some common ones that work well for most teams:

- Attend team meetings.
- Come to meetings prepared with assigned actions completed.
- Participate in discussions and problem-solving.

- Show respect for other members, even if you disagree with their opinions.
- Share all information that will impact team performance.
- Do your fair share of the work.
- Help other team members whenever possible.
- Decisions are made by consensus when possible.

Additionally, you may want a rule about interruptions, including cell phones and pagers.

Developing the Team

We have looked at how to bring a group of people together and get them to collaborate as a team instead of focusing strictly on their individual performance. There are two basic aspects to improving teamwork, as we have noted: improving performance of their collective tasks and developing better trust, respect, and relationships between members. It is the interplay between these two team essentials that determines the efficiency and effectiveness of team performance.

As with individual followers, a team that knows what to do—has skills and clear goals—will only go so far in their team performance. It is the addition of interpersonal dimensions that will create the highest level of team performance. Part of the focus of this section of the course will be on building stronger team relationships.

Building Team Relationships

A team whose members like, respect, and enjoy each other work together more effectively than a team with poor relationships among members. The leader must be proactive in building strong relationships. This means there must be regular opportunities for team members to get to know one another individually and take pleasure in each other's company. A group of co-workers that socialize appropriately at work and after work learn to trust each other. They respect each other's skills and share information more freely. This does not mean that everyone on your team must be close friends; respect and appreciation of one another's strengths, however, are essential.

Make opportunities for people to spend time together when they are can have fun, not only when they are discussing work. Encourage laughter and tasteful humor. Make time for chit-chat. Pleasant banter builds bonds that create stronger teamwork and higher performance. Socializing is something that can get out of hand unless you are clear about its limits and keep it manageable. A team with good camaraderie gets more work done in a shorter period of time than a team whose members are marginally connected and largely work as independent contributors.

As the leader, you should make opportunities for the team to get together, and eating together regularly produces powerful results. Eating a meal or snack together provides a relief from the routine, helps put people on an equal footing, and helps them put aside their differences. Vary your approach. You might try breakfast foods and coffee with 20 minutes of socializing before a staff meeting. You might try providing pizza for lunch or suggest a carry-in. Celebrate anything you can celebrate with end-of-the-day popcorn or ice cream. People who have face-to-face time with each other, laugh together, and eat together develop stronger relationships. They solve problems jointly, help each other out, and put in extra effort in times of stress.

A leader can also model good team relationships by using many of the skills we learned earlier, including good listening, clear speaking, positive reinforcement, and frequent feedback. An open and supportive approach with individual members spills over to the entire team and results in good relationships. This promotes a high level of willingness to perform as a team. Good relationships are based on mutual trust.

Three Levels of Trust

In order to get employees to share their ideas, work their hardest, and commit their energy each day to their job, they must trust one another and trust the leader. If people believe that something they say or do will be used against them, they will become defensive and spend time covering their tracks instead of producing. The best leadership is built on *trust* between the leader and follower. One helpful way to think about trust is to think in terms of the following three levels of trust.

Level One: At this level of trust, we believe only what someone says and no more. They are honest, and we trust them only to do what they say they will do. I know you will take care of your own interests but not necessarily my interests, unless they coincide with yours. The implication of this level of trust is that when we need to make a joint decision, I need to be in the room with you to protect my interests. I trust you to do what you say as long as I can hear what you say and remind you to do it.

Level Two: The second level of trust is a bit deeper. Now, I trust you to consider the impact on me of what you do when you make a decision or take action. I recognize that the decision you make will still be what's best for you in the end. I will accept your decision because I know you considered me when making it. It helps me to hear your rationale.

Level Three: The third and deepest level of trust is when I trust you enough to make decisions that actually put my interests above your own. This is the level of trust a child often has for a parent. This means that when decisions are being made I don't have to be present to state my case or to hear your position. I *trust* you enough to know that you put my interests first.

Most leaders today have not developed a level of trust beyond Level One or Level Two with their employees, yet high performing teams often show Level Three trust for one another. The leader must serve as the model for developing trust. Every action others see from you day to day has potential to build to Level Three trust or, conversely, the potential to stop you from establishing full trust. The further you are from this goal, the less productive your team will be.

How to Increase Trust

You can work to achieve Level Three trust. Remember how important trust is to *you* in your own relationships. Your employees feel the same. Developing a higher level of trust with employees should be a goal for every leader. First of all, check your own attitude. How often do you treat people like objects, rather than recognize and acknowledge their humanity? Recognize that developing further trust is both necessary and possible, and it begins with you. Replace any attitudes of mistrust by extending additional trust to others; you will begin receiving trust from them. The following are some specific actions you can take.

- **Consistency.** When the leader behaves fairly and consistently, people will learn that they can count on the leader's response; the leader is predictable.

- **Integrity.** Living up to promises and being honest with employees, peers, clients, and every stakeholder every time is crucial. Say what you are going to do and do what you say you will do. Do not betray or turn against people who are learning to trust you. Integrity also has to do with ethics, which will be discussed in more detail later in the course.

- **Take a risk with them.** Delegate a small task to someone and tell them you have confidence they will be able to do it. Encourage them and, at the same time, let them know you will hold them responsible for the task. Thank them sincerely when they complete the task. When you step out in faith that an employee can and will follow through on an assignment, you are building trust. When you extend trust first to them, you will receive trust and respect from them.

- **Self-disclosure.** When you reveal things about yourself, people come to trust you more fully. You do not seem so unapproachable, and you improve the relationship when you are willing to share appropriately about yourself. This does not mean that you need to discuss truly private things, but you should share some personal things, such as family activities or leisure interests. Enter conversations with employees and peers and contribute your share. Ask them questions about their family or activities to encourage them to talk, too.

- **Listening.** Giving an employee your full attention when they need it, as we have discussed before, builds a great deal of trust. No one expects you to be a marriage counselor, a financial advisor, or a substance abuse counselor. But when productivity is being negatively impacted for an employee who is obviously upset by personal problems, offering a listening ear to let him or her ventilate is a smart thing to do. You may want to advise them to seek professional help (ask your human resources department for some names of local helping professionals), and you may even want to make the call to set up the appointment while the employee is in your office.

- **Keep confidences.** Never reveal something told to you in confidence. If you are not clear what should be kept confidential, ask the person who told you, or better yet, keep it *all* confidential.

- **Working *with* them.** Team members come to respect and trust a leader who will pitch in and help them in difficult situations. You don't have to do their work every day, but showing you are not too good to pitch in at busy times greatly increases employees' trust of you.

- **With time.** Trust is not something that is built overnight but takes time and patience. *However*, once trust has been nurtured, just one wrongful action *can* destroy it overnight.

The Value of Differences

The workforce of today is diverse in many ways and becoming more so each day. Employees differ in workers' gender, age, skill level, physical condition/handicap, race, language, religion, lifestyle, and family structure. But despite these differences people must increasingly work together in teams.

On the surface, it might appear that if you could keep the team composition as similar as possible this would enhance teamwork. However, homogeneous teams are less likely to be high-performing teams. Although people tend to get along better and have fewer conflicts with people who are like them in personality, values, and past experiences, there is a grave danger when we build a team whose members are all quite similar.

Just as you would not want to build a baseball team composed only of hitters, you cannot build a good work team only with people who are very similar. A baseball team needs people who can pitch, catch, run, throw, and make good snap judgments, in addition to people who can hit. Without the exchange of ideas and complementary skills that comes from having team diversity, the team's performance will suffer.

Experience shows that homogenous teams stifle innovation, resist change, rest on their laurels without continuing to improve, and lose their ability to adjust quickly to competition. They are often more interested in getting along and "not rocking the boat" than improving their results. When a group is composed of too many people with similar background, interests, and skills, everybody may be good at the same things, and there may be other things nobody does very well. These conditions are contrary to what's needed in today's organization. That's why it's very important to build a team composed of individuals who are diverse in many ways. Responsiveness to the external environment is essential for the organization's survival in today's rapidly changing world.

What teams need, then, is members whose strengths complement one another; members with differing points of view who will engage in healthy conflict and exchange of ideas; members who recognize and respect each other's strengths and depend on one another to achieve their mutual goals. There will inevitably be some conflict but working through conflict will help the team develop better solutions to problems and develop stronger bonds.

When there are significant differences, team members may not understand or trust each other right away. Old stereotypes and biases may come out with some members. In today's organization there is no room for such attitudes. The leader must model **no tolerance for intolerance** of differences and enforce this fundamental value among the entire team. Simply tolerating one another is a first step, but it's a long way from the kind of relationships evident in high performing teams. Mutual respect and anti-harassment polities are essential. They are also the law! Part of the purpose of this course is to help you create an organization that purposely respects each individual and an organization where unfair treatment is simply not part of the culture.

People can and will learn to get along and like each other when they are given time and encouragement to get to know one another's strengths. Let your team know that you appreciate your team's differences and how these differences will be an asset for the department. If diversity training would be helpful for them to fully appreciate one another, lobby your manager or your HR office to help you arrange this for your group.

As team members interact over time and experience more successes, the leader should begin to allow the team more freedom to make their own decisions. Hold them accountable for those decisions and reward them for their successes as a team. Gradually, the team will move to a more advanced stage and collectively perform. When this happens, the leader can use less directive, task-focused behaviors and more and more coaching and delegating behaviors.

Team Accountability

Teams must have clear goals, know the role each member plays, and have the ability and willingness to do the job. Willingness, in this case, goes beyond individual attitude and includes the level of team spirit and mutual trust. When willingness is high, they have the pieces in place to achieve, especially if rewards and incentives support high performance. The leader must be sure that resources and needed training are available to the team. He/she must pave the way for team success. A team that meets these characteristics and demonstrates results is generally at a high level of performance and should be able to control most of its own day-to-day activities.

When the team has this level of freedom and control based on its outstanding performance, it also has a high degree of responsibility. Under the old top-down management model, the manager or supervisor controlled and closely monitored activities. Productivity was the leader's responsibility, and the leader was accountable.

In today's organization, leaders at all levels rarely have time to closely monitor employee activities. The team approach has shown us that not only is it unnecessary to have close supervision with a high functioning team, it is actually counter-productive. Good teams police themselves. Peer pressure dictates that members will pull their weight. In tough times, team members pitch in to help each other. Relationship bonds help to keep members in line—most people do not want to disappoint their peers who are also their friends colleagues.

Members challenge each other and hold one another accountable so that team goals are collectively met and team rewards are achieved. Members also work hard when they know they are being held accountable. If the team has been responsible for the achievement of its goals, it should be collectively recognized and rewarded. Positive consequences will help keep their level of performance high.

If team goals are not met, there may be consequences to pay, depending on whether they could have anticipated or controlled the problem. If the team was negligent in its performance, appropriate discipline may be needed. Team members may be embarrassed, disappointed or angry for failing to achieve their bonus, for example. The leader and team members will have to promptly identify what went wrong and determine what corrective action should be taken so the same thing will not occur again. This involves problem-solving.

Team Problem-Solving

In the organization of the past, an employee might come to a manager with a complaint or let the manager know when there was a problem. The manager might either offer a solution or "look into it." The latter often meant it would be forgotten. The team approach requires that individuals not only come forward with complaints and problems but that they *offer solutions* at the same time. The solution may be specific or it may be something general like, "I want to take this to the next team meeting to get the team's ideas."

Problems or issues will inevitably arise from time to time, even in high-performing teams who are meeting or exceeding goals. Instead of the leader hearing the complaint and solving the problem, however, teamwork means that the team members themselves, collectively, analyze the problem, discuss it, and work out a solution.

Teams which have the ability must be encouraged to generate ideas and develop their own solutions. The leader should make it clear that he/she does not solve the problems. Individuals or groups who voice a complaint need to do so only if they can offer a suggestion, too. The team's mission is to meet its goals and overcome any barriers to achieving those goals. Without such a mindset, team meetings can become gripe sessions that sap the energy of the group and lower morale.

The leader can call a team meeting and present the issue or "problem," asking members for their ideas. Or another team member can be in charge of and lead this kind of meeting. Either way, the leader should not offer his or her own solutions initially but should encourage followers to voice their ideas. The leader can help the group by asking questions that may lead them to an answer. These may be questions such as: "How would you handle…?" "What advantage would that provide?" "How would you take into account…?" Similar questions to these examples encourage team members to think for themselves. By reasoning through the relevant issues, team members learn and grow in ability; they confidence improves. They learn how to solve their own problems. By coming up with many ideas and then combining and evaluating ideas, a collective solution will emerge—a solution that is generally superior to why any one person could devise.

The goal in this situation is to reach a solution that everyone in the group can say either: "Yes, this is the best way to go," or at least, "This is not my first choice solution, but I can live with it." This is the definition of consensus. By continuing to practice group problem-solving, the team's commitment level and performance will increase.

What Is Participation and Why Is It Important?

Participation means seeking out suggestions on business problems or procedures from the team members—the people who are actually doing the work. You may be wondering how advisable participation really is. It sounds like it might complicate your decisions, and it probably takes a long time to get everybody's ideas. Wouldn't it just be smarter for the leader to make the decisions? The answer is usually "No" (only in a crisis would the answer be "Yes"). When the leader makes the decision, he or she may be taking the easier way out in the short-term, but in the long-term the consequences of leader-only decisions are often quite negative. Here's why:

- Leader-only decisions can be off-base. While you may be very familiar with the job tasks you lead (perhaps having done them yourself in the past), you are generally not doing those tasks on a day-to-day basis now. Since that is the case, many decisions you make could benefit from the input of those who currently do the task, may have ideas for improvement, and who will be most affected by any changes.

- When we ask employees for their input in decisions *before* they are made rather than telling them of the decision afterwards, they are more committed to that decision. Employees will try harder to make the situation work when they have helped create the solution, and there will be less resistance to change.

- If the solution is always provided to them, employees are not encouraged to grow. When we encourage the follower to offer solutions, the follower is forced to stretch and grow and not become dependent upon the leader. This makes the follower more competent and increases competency and performance.

- When people believe their input is important, they feel valuable. They feel good about themselves and take pride in their work. Never underestimate the power of making people feel important. When your team members feel that the organization values them, it increases their willingness and thus their morale and productivity.

Sharing the Load

Some team leaders operate under the mistaken impression that it is their responsibility to know all the answers—or, at the least, to act as if they know all the answers. This is a very unwise approach to leadership. As an educated and specialized professional you may have often served in the role of a subject matter expert where you were expected to have an opinion and, in fact, were paid for exactly that. When you are in a leadership position, you are no longer being paid almost entirely for your subject matter expertise. This is an important difference. Your leadership task is to inspire and coordinate the work of others—to get work done through others. You can serve as a knowledge resource for members of your staff or project team, but that is only one small part of your responsibility. If you find that many times when you get your team together you are giving them a scholarly lecture on fine technical points of your profession, much like a college professor, you need to readjust your focus.

Your leadership focus needs to be developing the competencies of others, not providing them all the answers. Rather than making the leader seem highly competent, this approach is simply makes the leader appear arrogant. Asking the opinions of others is not only a good idea; it is, in fact, essential in today's business environment. You will not know all the answers—no one does; and you need not suffer under the impression that you should know all the answers. Encourage your employees to develop their own expertise and professional confidence by providing resources. Give direction to help them find an answer without encouraging dependency by giving them the answer.

If a question comes up that you cannot answer, you should first admit that you do not know. If you can't easily come up with an answer in discussing it with the person who asked, tell them you will try to find an answer. The important thing to know is that you have resources where you can seek out an answer—whether those resources are your boss, others within your organization, or those outside the organization such as recognized experts. Another excellent place to look for information and solutions is to get the whole team together, as we discussed previously, and collectively tackle a problem or issue.

Many of the problems you face will not have one and only one correct and perfect answer. This is often in contrast to certain scientific and technical problems you are familiar with which may have an exact solution. Often there are multiple acceptable solutions in the realm of human issues, and if you share the load with your team by asking for their participation, you will devise more effective solutions than any one of you could have devised working independently of the others.

If you are the only competent expert, you will not progress in your own career until you develop those around you to take your place. Having higher career options requires that you become more of a generalist and more knowledgeable about business strategy and leadership of people. This means you will need to push yourself to develop parts of yourself that you may not have previously concentrated on.

People appreciate and respect your honesty when you admit you don't have all the answers and ask for appropriate help. If you don't know an answer, the key to success is to commit yourself and your team to finding an answer. Far from making you seem incompetent, admitting you don't know something increases people's respect for you because you trust them enough to be honest and not fake it. If you fake it, most of the time people see through this anyway; it's much better to be honest.

Listening and Facilitation Skills

If you are new to leadership or if you are trying to move to more of a coaching and participation style, it will be helpful if you begin having individual meetings with your employees. As you get to know them better, both as individuals and as a team, consider having regular meetings in which your whole group participates. Weekly or bi-weekly meetings work well for many teams or departments. Depending on your setting, monthly meetings may be insufficient for good participation. If you have a staff that is widely geographically dispersed, schedule regular telephone conference meetings and in-person meetings possible. Such meetings reduce the common employee complaint of not knowing what's going on or not having any voice in decisions. Having productive face-to-face time encourages teamwork.

Developing Facilitation Skills

Encouraging participation among the team begins with effective listening skills (discussed earlier) and effective facilitation skills. Facilitation skills are important skills to develop for those times when you bring the team or other small groups of people together, and you are in charge of conducting the meeting.

Facilitation means leading or conducting a meeting in a way that makes it comfortable for others to share their ideas and expertise. Leading a meeting using facilitation skills is at the heart of encouraging participation among employees. It means encouraging those who tend to be less vocal to offer their ideas and politely limiting talk time of the vocal members. Facilitation means being a discussion starter and encouraging dialog, while avoiding long speeches or one-way communication.

As an example, a leader may need to present some new information to the group. He/she should state it as succinctly as possible, then ask the group for their reaction—their concerns and opinions. One technique of facilitation is to offer a number of open-ended questions that encourage dialog. But facilitation doesn't mean just asking questions of team members. It means listening to their answers! Much like the kind of listening we discussed earlier, good facilitators summarize and clarify the position of speakers for all those present. Good facilitation techniques include:

- Presenting information succinctly
- Not offering your own opinion on the information or problem right away
- Asking the group for their comments first before taking a public stand
- Asking probing questions.

- Using good listening skills.
- Summarizing the ideas of each speaker before moving to the next speaker.

Leading Effective Meetings

Meetings are an important way to develop your team—both to build relationships and to keep everyone focused and informed. Meetings based on a facilitation style can be particularly effective. No one likes having too many meetings, especially if they are long and accomplish little. However, getting everyone together regularly to capitalize on their collective wisdom is very important. Good meetings represent time well invested because they improve communication, problem-solving, accountability, and potentially keep relationships strong.

Conducting meetings is an increasingly important task of leaders at all levels. We have all attended poorly-run meetings—the kind we wish to avoid. Here are some tips to help you make your meetings more effective any time you are in charge.

1. Have meetings at a regular time so everyone can plan their schedule around them, whether daily, weekly, bi-weekly, monthly, or whatever works for your group.
2. Always have an agenda, even if it's informal. Conducting a meeting with no plan is a recipe for low productivity and rambling, the kind of meeting we all hate because it seems like a waste of our time. Circulate your agenda ahead of time, if possible, so people can think about the items in advance. Allow team members to add items they want to bring up as time allows.
3. Start the meeting on time. Don't wait for people to come in late. If you start on time, they will learn to get there on time.
4. If you dislike being in front of a group, practice ahead of time how you will open the meeting so you will feel confident as you begin. Memorize your first few sentences, if necessary. This will help you feel more confident.
5. Take a deep breath as you start so you don't run out of air. Once you get past the first few minutes you will feel more relaxed and much less nervous.
6. Convey an attitude of confidence, even if you don't feel that way, by being very familiar with any material you need to present. Most of the time other people cannot tell you are nervous, if you get down to business.
7. Practice so you can speak with a business-like, authoritative tone of voice. Use overheads, diagrams, handouts, or electronic presentations that may help your audience understand any new material—but keep such items simple and uncluttered.
8. Use a presentation outline for any remarks you need to make and stick to your outline. You should know your material well enough that you can present it easily. Practice, if you are uncertain.
9. If one item on the agenda seems to require more discussion time than you expected, don't let it crowd out everything else. Pause the discussion and tell the team you will put this item first on the agenda for next meeting, allowing more time for discussion and resolution.
10. Encourage others to stick to the agenda. Don't be reluctant to say, "I think we've gotten off track here. What we are trying to decide is…"

11. Do not let one or two people dominate the meeting. Take them aside after the meeting and individually ask them to help you by drawing others out and asking for others' opinions too.
12. Try to include everyone, even the quiet ones, by specifically asking them for their comments on some issues.
13. If you are conducting the meeting, have someone else take notes. It's especially helpful to write down decisions made and actions that need to be taken. This is essential for follow-up.
14. Summarize at the end of the meeting exactly what action each person is responsible for and the due date. Include your own action items, too.
15. Schedule an ending time for the meeting, and end when you say you will. Be mindful of the time and pace the discussion accordingly. People will often talk endlessly if you let them. If you know you have only one hour or a certain length of time, you will stick to business.
16. Circulate a summary of the meeting as a reminder to those present and those who should have been present of new information, decisions, and actions. Keep it short so people will read it. A bulleted list may be ideal.
17. If you get "stage fright" yourself and hate conducting meetings, try taking a public speaking course (you'll learn a lot!) or try sitting on the side of the table rather than at the head. Remain seated rather than standing when you speak. Begin your leadership of meetings with small groups, if possible, in order to build your confidence to lead larger or more powerful ones.

How to Get Others to Participate in Meetings

Some people may be very hesitant to offer their ideas, especially if they are unaccustomed to meetings where they are expected to offer ideas, or if they are simply reserved and prefer not to speak up. Other employees may become very domineering, when they finally have someone's attention. How do you get your employees to speak up and participate, but not participate so much that they dominate meetings?

- **Ask/Probe**
  In one-to-one sessions or team meetings, ask questions that cannot be answered with yes/no answers. Make them think and don't accept one-word answers. Especially ask questions that begin with "how," "what," "when," and "why."

- **Listen and Summarize**.
  When you ask a question, be silent to allow people time to think. Use all your good active listening skills. Someone will finally speak up. Don't criticize or cut people's ideas short; if you do, the next time they won't speak up at all. Summarize what they said to be sure you understand.

- **Draw out**
  Draw out reluctant members. If you have team members who are quiet, make it a point to ask them their opinion, not to embarrass them but to give them room to speak

if they want. "What do you think, Terry?" Quiet people often have spent time thinking are have great insight on the issue.

- **Thank**
  Thank or compliment your employees for offering an idea. They were trying, and that's exactly what you want, even if the idea is not a good one, in your opinion.

- **Be open**
  Do not offer your own opinion initially but simply pose your question to them. Be careful not be critical of what they say, and don't assume that you already have the solution. Check your own motives here to be sure you are not just trying to lead the group to your foregone conclusion.

- **Be patient**
  If you continue asking for their participation and you show them you want their ideas, your team members will finally develop new habits and begin opening up in meetings.

Keeping Dominant Members under Control

Many leaders have the opposite problem to that described above, i.e., they have meetings in which people participate too much. If this describes your situation, it's important to do something about this problem so others have a chance to contribute without being run over by an aggressive or extroverted colleague.

One way to handle this is to acknowledge their good intention first. . Sometimes people speak up because they worry that no one else will say anything, and they feel like they should "get things rolling." If they were not genuinely interested in the issue or the situation being discussed was unimportant to them, they probably would not be so vocal.

Try calling them aside after a meeting and speaking privately with them. Tell them you know that they often know most of the answers already or have a greater understanding than some of the people in the room. Because of this fact, you are specifically asking for their help. You believe others in the group have begun to rely on them for answers rather than think for themselves. You want to challenge and better develop the others and spread the responsibility for thinking around to others. Ask them to help you next meeting by waiting for others to bring up some ideas first before they express themselves. Thank them for their help. This both acknowledges that you are "impressed" with what they know (and they may be speaking up mostly to impress you) and gives them the opportunity to "help you." Most people honestly want to be helpful

This approach will keep them engaged and interested without insulting them. Taking a positive approach is much more effective than a negative confrontation from your own point of anger. If you tell them to, "Stop dominating the meetings. Give other people a chance to talk," this approach is likely to create resentment and mistrust.

Brainstorming

Another great way to encourage participation is *brainstorming*. Many people have done an informal or shortened version of this technique. Genuine brainstorming involves having the group make a list of as many suggestions, reasons, or solutions as possible related to a particular issue. When used correctly, brainstorming follows certain rules. Here are the rules for how to use brainstorming in a team meeting:

1. Clearly define the problem or issue and ask for ideas.

2. List ALL the ideas on a flip chart or white board for everyone to see. Do not judge or comment on the ideas in this step; just list them as quickly as people can say them. If participants forget this, remind them that you are not accepting comments or evaluations at this point.

3. Encourage odd or even crazy ideas and add them to the list. They may not be adopted exactly as presented but certain features of these "offbeat" ideas may be useful.

4. List as many as you can. Encourage the group to go for quantity of responses. Push them to go beyond the standard ten or twelve and come up with twenty or more ideas. The best ideas often come after the group thinks it has no more ideas.

5. Once *all* the ideas are listed, then go back through the list and discuss each one—combining parts of ideas that relate to each other and having the group help you eliminate those that truly won't work, until a solution emerges that everyone can support. For some people, the chosen solution won't be their first choice, but it should be one they can live with. This is how brainstorming helps with consensus-building.

Participation Becomes Empowerment

Participation, using general discussion or brainstorming, takes time. Solutions are usually not reached quickly. But the time you invest on the front end will be well worth the increased buy-in among employees when a new decision is implemented. Contrast that with a leader-only decision where time must be invested on the *back* end, after the decision has been made, in order to sell the idea and monitor compliance. Participation requires more time in the planning stages and less time in implementation.

As people become more accustomed to being asked their opinions, both individually and in teams, they will volunteer more and take more initiative. This is an example of increased employee commitment and is exactly what you are trying to accomplish. When they can see that their input and recommendations are being implemented or at least being taken into consideration, performance improves.

When people have more voice in decisions they have a greater feeling of control. With more control comes more responsibility. No longer can they always blame mistakes on their leaders by saying, “I was just doing what I was told.” All employees, then, must do their fair share and pull their weight on the task. People who help make a decision share the responsibility for implementing that decision and share accountability for its consequences.

As we have discussed before, being held accountable means receiving positive rewards for your work when it is done well. It means standing up and taking the heat when the decision does not work out so well and learning from mistakes in order to correct them in the future.

What we have just described is **empowerment—**sharing the power. Empowerment does not mean that the leader has lost control or is derelict in his/her duties. Quite the opposite! It means that the leader is appropriately delegating to capable others and getting the job done through others. This is what leadership is all about. Empowerment, like communication, is a two-sided coin. On the one side, employees participate in decision-making and have greater say-so and control. On the other hand, employees have responsibility and accountability for the outcomes.

To become fully empowered, the team must have the tools it needs to accomplish its goals. One of the necessary tools for effective empowerment is information on current performance. Without feedback and specific information on how they are doing, empowering a team is bound to fail. Obtaining and using metrics as a team scorecard to help set goals and make decisions is an integral part of that process, as we will discuss in an upcoming section.

Delegating Work to Others

One of the single, most difficult management skills for most managers is delegation, and it is enormously important in the organization. Leaders who fail to turn over work to their direct reports are usually frustrated and overwhelmed with the amount of work they have. This level of stress can cause physical or emotional problems and takes its toll on the leader’s personal life. In addition, failure to delegate and develop capable followers limits the supply of the talent within the organization.

Many leaders fail to delegate because they like being in control. Holding on to information and decision-making authority is a source of self-esteem. Many others fail to delegate because they feel overly responsible or guilty if they do not personally have a hand in everything that’s going on. They may believe that 1) no one can do it as well as they can; 2) it’s quicker to do it themselves than to train someone else to do it; or 3) doing it themselves will make them more needed in the organization and increase their job security. These reasons, however, reveal an unattractive side of a leader to others: 1) arrogance; 2) short-sightedness, and 3) insecurity. Others come to believe one or more of these things about the leader who will not delegate, even if the leader does not consciously believe any of these things.

As an increasingly confident and strategic-thinking leader, you must focus attention on the development of this important skill. Skillful and timely delegation is a hallmark of good leadership. It is true that the handover of tasks and responsibilities to others requires some time; this time is an investment. Short-term thinking says, "I'll do it myself because it's quicker." You build better long-term results if you coach and train others to take over certain responsibilities. By learning to delegate you will impress your boss, reduce your level of stress, accomplish more by spreading the workload, and develop higher capacity in your employees.

How to Delegate

The leader's job is to build the skills of his or her direct reports and others and to build strong relationships that encourage motivation. Many employees who are skilled simply lack initiative or confidence that they are ready for the next level. This is the time at which the leader needs to begin slowly turning tasks, projects, and decision-making authority over to them.

As you continue to read in this section of the course, it may help you to think specifically about your own situation. Use your own work tasks and your employees as examples. This personalized approach will help you begin to apply the skills of delegation to your own situation. After convincing yourself of the importance of learning to delegate more effectively, the first thing you should do is to identify two of three of your most reliable performers. Consider why you chose these people. Do they know they are your top performers? Do you thank them regularly for their contributions and give them other forms of recognition? You want to begin with the attitude that your delegation to them is a way of affirming their achievements; it is a reward for their excellent work. Make sure they know why they were selected. Keep these people in mind as you study the rest of the information on delegating.

Identify some tasks or projects you currently do that could be performed by one of the capable people you thought of above. You may want to think about what kinds of things would be essential functions if you were suddenly out of work for a period of months and had to rely on others to carry on. What would be important for them to know and do? If you are the only one in your organization that knows these things, your organization is at risk. It's time to bring some others on board to develop them, add security to the organization, and take the pressure off you.

Examining your tasks and responsibilities to see what could be delegated is important. However, if you only designate tasks and decide to assign new responsibilities to each of the employees you identified above, you may create resentment. People may see these additional assignments as the boss dumping work on them, especially if their plates are already full. Instead of feeling proud that they were selected for greater involvement, they may feel overwhelmed.

Part of the key to helping your selected employees appreciate your delegation to them is if you not only assign new responsibilities but if you also allow them authority to make certain decisions surrounding that responsibility. No longer do they have to come to you for approval; they have decision-making authority in clearly-acknowledged areas. In addition, you may also need to reassign certain other work to make it possible for them to complete their new responsibilities. As a trickle-down effect, this may help you to develop and encourage certain lower level employees as well as your star performers.

The Delegating Conversation

A carefully planned delegating conversation with your selected employee when you turn over a responsibility to them is essential. This is the time at which you work out the details and get their agreement. If you are the boss, you could issue an order: "I expect you to do ABC now." But this entire course has been focused on building a culture in which a leader rarely, if ever, issues orders because that approach is simply less effective than getting people to perform because they want to. Instead, schedule a one-to-one meeting with your employee to hand over the task or project you identified. Plan to include the following steps in your conversation:

1. Begin by telling them you need their help. Most people are pleased and more open when you approach them in this positive way. It implies that they are valued and that you think they are capable of helping.
2. Tell them you have been observing them and that their performance has been very good. (This statement should not be new news to them. If it is, you have not been doing your job. If this is the first time or the first time in a long time they have heard this, they will think you are giving them a compliment in order to be manipulative and get them to do something, and they may resent it.) Tell them you believe they are now ready to take on _____, and you would like to train them how to do so. Be sure you emphasize that this is an opportunity and a privilege.
3. Describe the project and explain the results you expect. Notice that this step does **not** say, "Tell them how to do it." This is an important distinction. If you tell them every single step in how they must do the task in order to get to the result, this becomes like leading by giving them orders—a style you must clearly avoid.
4. Instead of using a "telling" style, ask them how they think they would go about completing this assignment and achieving the results. Guide them to a workable plan by asking them questions and only giving your advice when necessary. This helps them to stretch and grow. Chances are good they may approach this assignment differently than you did. You will need to adopt an open and curious attitude here. There are often multiple "correct" ways to achieve the same results. It does not have to be done your way! If it does, find something else to delegate.
5. If your employee is reluctant to take on the new task, find out why. Is it lack of confidence that they can do it? If so, reassure them. Is there some key skill or knowledge they will need? If so, discuss training options. Is it that they are already overloaded? If so, be willing to discuss this with them. Perhaps you may not be fully aware of all that they are working on. Help them readjust their priorities if needed. Delegating a new assignment to them may mean that you have to be willing to reassign some of their other work. Discuss this with them—what, how, and who? Be

open to having several of these meetings in which you reassign certain aspects of the workload.

6. Follow up on progress. Set a reasonable time by which this task or project can be completed and get their agreement. Then set a date halfway to two-thirds of the way to the deadline date for a progress check. If the project is complex you may need to schedule several check-in times. This will establish times to confer and make sure things are on track. It will allow you to reinforce your employee's good progress and allow them to report what they have done and ask questions. If they have made mistakes, do not reprimand them (unless they knowingly did something out of line) or lose your cool. Problem-solve with them to correct any issue, and remember that people learn from mistakes. Make sure, too, they know you are available to them at any time for questions on this project. Then, leader, get out of their way and let them do their work.
7. Continue to have your regular coaching feedback sessions with your employee, so they both give you and receive from you honest opinions on how they are performing their new job responsibilities.

Remember that delegation to subordinates will free you up to take on more strategic projects, issues confronting your organization and profession, and opportunities to have a bigger impact in your organization. Practicing and mastering delegation is a wise career move for you and helps you build a stronger organization.

Why Metrics Are Increasingly Needed

Today's leaders need a greater understanding of the business aspects of their jobs, not just technical expertise in their field. This means having fuller knowledge about *how* your organization does what it does and *how well* it does what it does. How does your team's or unit's performance impact the whole organization? How can your team improve its performance? These are important questions for leaders at all levels.

When we want to improve something, we need to know the current level of that variable. We, then, know each time we measure that item whether or not we are improving. Goal setting and performance improvement begin with measurement. The result of our measurement is a number often called a *metric.* Once we know our metrics (how much or how many of some variable), we can set new goals and implement measures to improve individual and team performance. A metric can function as a kind of team or individual score. A team only improves its strategies and performance by knowing its score.

Think of the scoreboard at an athletic event. What would happen to the game if we didn't keep score? Or consider bowling as an example. Would you continue to bowl if you couldn't see the pins drop and had no way of knowing how you were doing? Yet, this is, in effect, what we ask employees to do every day when we provide them no "score" for how they are doing.

Planning, decision-making, trouble-shooting, and performance improvements are most often based on specific metrics—the numerical data your organization collects to monitor its performance. As we mentioned earlier in this course, most companies track information on work output, such as units produced (or clients served in service organizations), cost per job, rework, completion time, delivery time, and many other important measures.

Even though this information has been available to most managers for years, many companies in the past did not regularly share it with employees. In this age of empowerment where responsibility is being pushed lower in the organization, people at all organizational levels are more likely to be aware of some of these metrics. And for good reason! The more that leaders receive and share appropriate information, the more positive impact it can have on team and individual performance.

Using Multiple Measures: A Balanced Scorecard

In the organization of the past, performance was judged by looking strictly at the financial picture. However, when you use more than one measure of organizational or team effectiveness, you get a more complete and accurate picture of how the organization or team are really doing. One such approach is called *Balanced Scorecard.* Ideally, this is a strategic, organization-wide method of focusing on strategic priorities and goals and measuring a variety of variables relevant to overall goals. The company has strategic measures of its effectiveness, and every division and department has its own measures to support organizational priorities. The same idea of multiple measures can be applied to teams, projects, or departments. Individual performers, too, have performance metrics in several areas.

The Balanced Scorecard approach includes measuring the four areas below in order to get a more complete picture of organizational health and performance. A few examples are listed for each area.

- Financial – quarterly sales, inventory levels, stock prices, costs-per-unit or per-client, activity based cost.
- Customer – product quality, return rate, on-time delivery, customer/client satisfaction.
- Internal operations – adherence to the process, rework, time-to-completion, turnover.
- Learning and growth (innovation) – quality/quantity of training, new product initiatives.

In your own organization, some of these metrics may already be available to you. If all the metrics you receive are financial in nature, you may benefit from a broader perspective. For the information that you are receiving, you may want to ask: Is it timely? Is it frequent enough? Is it furnished to you in a form you can understand? Do you pay close attention to this information? Do you share it with your team? Gathering and sharing good metrics is an important responsibility of the leader.

Creating Your Own Balanced Scorecard

Unless you are a top decision-maker in your company, you can't, by yourself, initiate an organization-wide Balanced Scorecard. However, you can take this very useful model and simplify it for use with your own team. Begin by thinking of what you are curious about in regard to your team's performance—what could you measure that would yield information on how the team is doing? Your most significant metrics are often referred to as your critical performance indicators.

You can become more strategic and impact your organization more positively when you think broadly about performance metrics. What does your organization emphasize? Consider the above four categories of the Balanced Scorecard. Are there additional items in each category, beyond the metrics you currently receive, that would give you an indication of how you are doing? Make a list of any such ideas. Chances are good that you do not receive some of the items on your list of desired metrics. If so, you can be proactive in seeking out this information.

If you are a middle manager or project manager, begin by checking with your own boss and explain that you have been thinking about how you and your team can improve performance. Tell him or her about some of the performance metrics you think would be helpful and why. "If we knew how we were doing on X, I think we could improve…" Find out if this information is available or if it could be obtained. Your manager may be able to help you directly or may refer you to someone else, perhaps your information technology manager. If you are referred to another person, go to that person and present your concern. Find out if the performance indicator you want is among the data currently being collected. If not, could it be collected, or is there something else available that will meet your need?

You may meet with some surprise as you try to uncover sources of critical performance indicators. Many organizations are unaccustomed to having such questions from middle managers. Many of them will be quite delighted. But if you meet with some resistance and skepticism as a result of your request, it could be that someone is feeling threatened. Be polite and patient, but be persistent. Make sure everyone is clear that you are genuinely concerned about your team trying to do a better job. Make it clear that you are not trying to compete, take someone's job, or embarrass anyone. If you continue to stress your desire to improve, you are likely to be able to get at least most of what you are seeking. By continuing to add value to your organization, you positively impact your own career, too.

Using Your Scorecard Effectively

There are several important aspects to remember about Balanced Scorecards. First, do not choose too many metrics. If you do, this may diminish the potency of each number and distract people's attention from the most important indicators. A general rule of thumb is to choose no more than five regular metrics for your scorecard. Collect as many metrics as you want but choose only the most powerful few for your team's scorecard.

Second, every metric should have an owner—someone whose responsibility is to see to it that this number is moving in the right direction. *Measurements without ownership simply become reports for the file.* Make appropriate assignments so that even for metrics that involve the whole team, there is one individual who is in charge of this number and challenges teammates to move it in the right direction.

Sharing Information with the Team

It's fine for you to review the data which is given to you or to be able to use this data when calculating important measures. But if you do not share what you have learned with your team, you are unlikely to make a positive impact on their performance. If the report of critical numbers you receive is hard to understand in its format, presentation style, or complexity, you have two choices in sharing this information with your team as you make it part of the regular scorecard. You can either:

1) Give them a short briefing on the information to educate them. You can t each them to look for the relevant categories and ignore other data that is less relevant. Or:

2) Simplify and present the information more clearly or concisely. If you choose to simplify and extract only the relevant information, be sure that it is accurate and timely. The more current the information, the more impact it has.

Teach them how the numbers relate to the company's overall mission and goals, too. Dollar figures, customer numbers, and quality measures are especially potent in exposing people to how their work relates to the organization's overall health. Review the numbers with them. What things become obvious? Do they want to work to lower those numbers or should the figures be higher? Make sure everyone understands how their own work performance can help move the numbers in the right direction. Get their input on setting new goals as a team or as individuals. Let them know how often they will receive such feedback. To increase their involvement and participation, you may want to ask your team if they have suggestions for additional numbers that would be helpful for their scorecard.

Sharing Information: How and How Much?

You may have several choices of how to share the information you obtain as you track your team's progress. The most effective way, especially in the early stages, will probably be by means of a team meeting. At the meeting you will explain the information verbally as you present it visually in some form. One alternative is to present an electronic slide. If everyone has access to a computer, sharing information electronically prior to or after the meeting may also be an option.

In any event, it's a good idea to use both the verbal and visual methods of presenting the score to reinforce the learning. People learn in different ways, but visual reminders can be especially powerful. Try to find a visible place to post a copy of your results where all team members have a chance to see them frequently. This can serve as a reminder and motivator. Like the scoreboard in a sporting event, the visual display reminds everyone whether they are winning or losing. If the team finds itself "losing" in comparison to where it would like to be, team members can analyze the situation, problem-solve, and may be able to take corrective action to post a winning score. They can modify their individual and collective behavior to achieve the desired outcome.

Select a few of your most critical measures and regularly post this balanced scorecard for the team. Remember to make your charts or graphs large, bigger than 8 ½ X 11 if possible, and use color if you can for emphasis or to convey progress. Allow them to compare their progress with the previous month, week, or day. Presenting information in a form which shows improvement is particularly motivating.

Unless there is some compelling reason not to provide a full disclosure of the metrics (such as when the amount of data would be overwhelming), the rule should be: If you have it, share it. Even if the data is not part of the regular scorecard, share information that can aid your team in understanding the bigger picture of the company as a whole.

Using Metrics to Set Team Goals

As you meet with team members and share critical performance indicators, ask them to help you determine where improvement can be made. This may be an annual process, or it may be more frequent in your organization. Based on the numbers you have, can you set a reasonable percentage of improvement to strive for? By what period of time does the team think you can meet your new goal? Pick a reasonable number and a date for your new goal, and post this information as a reminder for the team. If information is available, provide regular updates on their progress in reaching their new goal.

When the team is allowed to have input in setting a goal for improvement, it is usually quick to rally around and do what is necessary to achieve the goal. As a leader you should continue to encourage them to set challenging goals. It usually becomes very motivating to the team to be able to pull together and "win" the numbers. Each time they reach a goal in one area, celebrate by recognizing their effort to upper management. Arrange some kind of appropriate reward, if possible, or plan a special event. Be sure you personally thank each of them for their contribution. Achieving a goal together and being recognized for it builds teamwork and improves team performance.

When they reach a goal, do not allow them to completely rest on their laurels. Encourage them to set a new goal. Once they have a taste of success, they will often continue to seek additional ways to improve. This is the attitude you want to build as you seek to have employees who are committed to continuous improvement, a topic that will be further discussed in an upcoming section.

Leading by Finding Common Meaning

As a leader it's important to give some thought to what you *really* do as an organization. What do you take pride in? What is the importance of your organization's work? In what way does it contribute to the world? If you are in an organization that conducts laboratory testing of new composite building materials, it's more inspiring to think of this as, "We work to make build materials safer, less expensive, and easier to use," rather than "We test composites." Why? The former statement engages the whole employee—it's more basic than the latter statement. In this way, people become more aware of the real significance, the greater good, in what they are doing. How does what you do improve people's lives? That's the real mission of your organization.

While it may sound silly, this is an important distinction that a leader should make. Part of your role is to provide the vision and inspiration. Simple changes in thinking and wording can help you better fulfill that role. Team members look to you to help them understand the real meaning of their jobs, and it is up to you, as a leader, to talk about the real meaning as often as possible. It is true that you are in business to make a profit, but you are not in *just any* business to be profitable. Someone saw a need and your organization is filling it. What is that need?

All of us like knowing there is some useful meaning or purpose to the jobs we do, beyond just the paycheck. Finding this sense of meaning and purpose is what helps employees and managers make a commitment to the organization and keeps them going when times are tough, rather than circulating their resumes on the slightest whim.

Each One is Important

Talented technical and professional workers are not easy to find. When you have good ones you unquestionably want to do all you can to keep them. That's another reason why one of your most important jobs as a leader is to let people know at each opportunity how important their work is to the company. Tell them! "Without you to do ______, this team could not be successful." Or offer a simple, "Thanks for your hard work," when they have done a little extra. When the leader makes such comments, it helps people feel more valued. Many companies have a slogan something like "We put our people first," but this is merely lip-service if they do not follow through with behaviors that value individual workers. The organization must genuinely treat people like individuals, not like objects or like sheep that simply follow along. As a leader you are in a key role to make this a reality every day.

Getting noticed by higher-ups also gives team members a feeling of value. Be sure that management two or three levels above the team know about the team's good performance. Good leaders at all levels should extend their thanks and congratulations to individual performers regularly—in person, by phone, in writing, or by e-mail. Higher management can and should also attend an occasional team meeting to say thanks and to open the lines of communication. If you are a manager in the middle, ask your own manager or his/her boss for this. Invite them to meetings ahead of time. The positive impact on productivity will be well worth their time and yours for pursuing it. When the company says to employees, "You are each important," this has no teeth, but taking time to actually come to a meeting and offer face-to-face dialog sends a powerful positive message of respect. Pay raises and bonuses can't replace being valued.

Living Right and Being a Role Model

In these days when many team members and leaders are concerned about balancing work and family time, it has become increasingly difficult for us to separate personal life from life on the job. Although you certainly have different parts to who you are and different arenas where you function, you *are* one whole person. What you do and don't do at home affects your life at work, and vice versa. If you recognize that your team members have personal lives and try to be as flexible as possible with them, they will reward you by remaining more dedicated and hard-working at work.

And, like it or not, as a leader you are also a role model for others. They look to you to see what behavior is acceptable. The old saw "Don't do as I do, do as I say," doesn't work for children, and it doesn't work for employees. Everything you do is visible to employees and serves as an example to them.

If you do not live by high ethical principals, your employees will not respect or trust you, even if they appear to "obey." Trust and productivity increase in teams whose leaders live with integrity. Leaders must:

- Maintain honesty in all dealings (in money management, with vendors, customers, regulators, and others) and refuse to cut corners.
- Never gossip and keep private information confidential.
- Stand up to higher management on behalf of your employees.
- Secure the needed resources and do so ethically.
- Stay within the law.
- Refrain from substance abuse.
- Avoid sexual misconduct.
- *And*, always treat people as you would wish to be treated, with respect for their uniqueness and humanity.

Using Persuasion and Influence

If you have been putting the lessons of ***Managing Technical Employees*** into practice in your own department and in your organization, you may already be seeing the benefits of stronger relationships with your employees. This change will not happen overnight, but within a few weeks or months of consistently good treatment by their managers, people will noticeably begin to respond more favorably.

As employees learn to trust and respect you even more, they will be developing greater ties of loyalty and commitment. Some employees take longer than others to extend trust and develop strong relationships with you. This is often based on their reserved personalities or, in some cases, histories of having few relationships worthy of trust. Reluctance to trust is not necessarily an indictment of your leadership or trustworthiness. If your employees are slow to trust, it's crucial that you persevere in extending them patience and compassion. Most will respond positively, sometimes quietly in their own ways.

As you continue to practice what you are learning in this course, the climate will slowly begin to change for the better. As your team members learn to extend trust, you must be careful not to abuse this trust and not use your influence with employees to exploit them for personal gain or one-sided organizational benefit.

Your ability to persuade others, both your followers and your own leaders, will improve as you develop additional confidence and take more initiative. Persuasion is truly based on having strong relationship bonds with others, not just your professional expertise. When you have built the foundations of good relationships, persuasion is much easier. People respect your opinion. Speak up and voice your opinions to your team and even to your own managers; offer explanations and reasons for your opinions. Let them see your own enthusiasm or passion for your role. You will seldom inspire or influence others to your point of view if you are noncommittal. If you disagree with someone, say so and explain why.

When you are assertive and take initiative, this may make it easier for your manager to do his/her job; your manager may appreciate your increased involvement. Some managers, however, are less secure in their positions and may feel threatened by your increased knowledge, confidence, and influence. If so, tread carefully. Try to use your best listening skills with your own manager. Be forthright and honest about discussing the relationship between the two of you. Let him/her know that you don't want to be a threat but that you'd like to help take some of the stress off the boss' shoulders if you can. Assertive communication, or stating your message in a straightforward way with a respectful, business-like tone, is the type of message most likely to be persuasive, both to your employees and to your own manager.

Performance Appraisals as a Tool for Employee Development

Your role as a leader includes the important responsibility of keeping performance among your team at a high level. A performance appraisal system can be a important part of the "score" for individual employees. The most effective performance appraisal systems are those that combine formal and informal evaluation methods. Previously we discussed the importance of giving F.A.S.T. (frequent, accurate, specific, and timely) feedback to employees, particularly when they are learning a new task. This feedback is an informal method of appraisal.

The current section will underscore the importance of giving formal feedback. Those companies that use formal appraisals typically evaluate an employee's job performance annually, often as part of determining what, if any, pay raise will be awarded. Informal appraisal happens whenever a leader gives an employee any information (good or bad) on how he or she is performing the job.

The performance of the organization as a whole is a result of many factors. Having excellent people is an important competitive edge for an organization. A well-done performance evaluation or appraisal system is one key to developing superior human resources. A good performance appraisal seeks to evaluate an employee on issues related to ability (knowledge and skills) and willingness (attitude and confidence) as well as other factors associated with achieving job goals.

Most companies use some form of a formal appraisal process. When it is properly executed and integrated with organizational strategy, a performance appraisal can be very helpful for employee and organization alike. Unfortunately, many leaders are poorly trained in how to complete a performance appraisal process; they often rush through or try to avoid it, thus negating its value as a tool for performance improvement.

In order to achieve the highest possible performance, an individual needs to clearly understand the goals and be able to assess progress toward those goals. A formal performance review provides an opportunity to clarify all of those items and set new goals or challenges. A well-done appraisal discussion can be a powerful teaching and learning opportunity for a leader and employee. In addition, it opens the lines of communication for frank discussion and a deeper level of understanding.

Normally, there are two parts to a performance appraisal: 1) completion of a written form; and 2) individual face-to-face discussion of items on the form and related matters. This can be done quarterly, semi-annually, or at the least, annually. Even if your organization does not use a formal or written evaluation form, a leader should still conduct this type of private discussion regularly with each employee. Daily thanks, praise, and informal discussion of goals are essential building blocks in this process, and every leader should continue these activities. However, informal conversations cannot substitute for a frank one-on-one discussion with some detail and depth.

Advantages of Formal Performance Appraisal

It may seem like a lot of trouble and time to put this information in writing, then sit down individually with each employee to discuss it, but such a process is very useful for at least three important reasons:

1. It is extremely important to have some kind of performance review in writing for **documentation** purposes. The process of evaluating performance in writing, dating, and keeping this information on file is called documentation. If there is ever any question about an employee or future legal questions arise, you have something to stand on legally to protect yourself and your organization. It's crucial to maintain up-to-date and honest performance evaluations.

2. Once an employee knows where he/she stands it may prompt **improved performance**. Having an area of concern expressed in writing may be a "wake-up call" to the employee. One goal of appraisal is to encourage them to improve, and such a frank discussion will often turn behavior around. The leader and follower can also agree in writing to any plans or expectations for training and development.

3. This is an ideal time to talk over problems or **suggestions** the employee may have for improving the job or the team. In our day-to-day conversations, we may not take the time to fully explore these important concerns. An open discussion allows time to explore the employee's ideas.

Performance Standards

Before you appraise your employees, it's important to know what you are looking for. What are the expectations, benchmarks, or standards? Standards should be reasonable and attainable. If you set the bar so high that virtually no one ever meets your expectations, then something is wrong. On the other end of the spectrum, if you continue to tolerate substandard performance and fail to discuss this promptly with an employee, this is also a problem.

When you allow mediocre performance from one or more employees who are not pulling their weight, you create resentment among your top performers. They see colleagues getting away with deficient performance, and this becomes demotivating to them if the leader fails to do something about this. Taking initiative as a leader to deal with this through coaching and feedback sessions is essential for the good of your whole team. Setting clear and reasonable standards which are enforced for everyone is not optional. While coaching and feedback sessions need to come first, performance appraisal is the next step, and it is the place to document any improvement that is needed.

How to Complete an Appraisal Process

Here are the steps you need to take to initiate an appraisal process. ***If your company already uses a specific written form to collect this information, utilize that form to begin an appraisal by <u>completing it according to instructions on the form</u> and begin with step 4 below to initiate the appraisal discussion.***

If your company does not have a specific form or system by which it collects this information for employees at all levels, as a leader it's still important that you conduct appraisals. Follow all the steps below which show you how to make this a valuable process that helps improve performance rather than a fruitless assignment that someone in your organization makes you do.

1) If the employee has an accurate written job description, check this document to look for specific tasks. If no such job description exists, you can simply list the employee's main tasks on a piece of paper. Break the employee's job into the *major* tasks he/she performs, not every single task, and make a list of these tasks. Observe

the job being performed or ask the employee to make a list of what he/she does. An average number of major tasks per employee would be three to six.

2) Part I—Job Tasks: Use a five-point rating scale where 1 is very low and 5 is very high. Write down ratings for the employee on each of the tasks you have listed. Try to think of example incidents to support the rating you selected, and write these down too.

3) Part II—Work Behaviors: You also need to consider how well the employee does on other measures of job effectiveness. Use the same five-point scale to rate the employee's performance on work behaviors. The following behavior factors are applicable to any setting:

   - Quality of work
   - Quantity of work
   - Relationship with coworkers
   - Dependability/punctuality
   - Initiative
   - Teamwork

   You may also want to include any other important behavior/performance factors (such as Safety) that are relevant to your situation. Rate the employee honestly. Do not give them high marks if they have not earned them, but don't be so harsh and critical that no one could ever receive a top rating.

   Whether the leader is writing out his/her own form or using the one provided by the organization, the next two steps relating to the discussion of results are crucial:

4) Ask the employee to rate his/her own performance on a copy of the organizational appraisal form or on the same job tasks and work behaviors list that you have used to rate them.

5) Sit down with them privately and discuss the ratings. For each item, first ask the employee for his/her self-rating. Find opportunities to compliment the employee whenever possible. Concentrate discussion especially on any areas where there is a difference in the employee's self-rating and the leader's rating. What is it the employee would need to do to meet standards, in your opinion? Record the employee's comments in writing on the same paper on which you rated the employee. Be sure to treat this as a dialog and use your best listening skills. Encourage them to offer ideas or suggestions that would strengthen the team. Get the employee to sign and date the form, and file this paper in a secure place.

Remember to treat the performance appraisal discussion as a chance to help your employees improve and strengthen your relationship, rather than a chance for you to get out the whip.

When used with regular ongoing FAST feedback from the leader, having an actual meeting in which the employee sits down with the leader can maximize performance improvement. A relationship built over time is the vehicle which causes the team member to take the leader's opinion seriously. An appraisal discussion can re-charge the relationship between the leader and the employee and help move the employee to a higher performance level. Team and individual productivity will continue to improve as the leader provides consistent feedback. Any persistent performance problems can be addressed calmly, as the next section explains.

Developmental Goals

You may identify developmental goals—areas where improvement is needed—either in a formal appraisal or in an informal discussion with an employee. There are two main categories of developmental goals that a performance appraisal should address.

1) Goals related to deficiencies or improvements needed which the employee must correct in order to meet expectations. One example of this situation is that you have a highly skilled or technical employee who has some challenges with his or her human relations skills. You may need to give the person some additional coaching and guidelines on what is expected in relation to others. Don't hesitate to do this. A brilliant software engineer or materials scientist who can't communicate or work with others will never be able to fully contribute to your organization, no matter how smart. You need to encourage and even require small changes that will move them to a higher level of performance. Find a mentor inside the company or hire an outside coach to work with this individual. People can and should be expected to be members of the team.

2) Goals related to career development and new challenges the employee desires to take on to further his/her knowledge and skills. What opportunities to grow is the employee seeking, and how can the organization support that? New assignments or responsibilities may be given to the employee or additional outside or inside training provided. Some organizations have the mistaken idea that when you train employees, they will just seek opportunities elsewhere with the increased competencies you have provided. This is simply untrue unless they are "encouraged" by an unfriendly organizational culture to leave. In fact, most highly skilled and technical employees will begin to look elsewhere if they are *not* given regular opportunities to learn and grow. The employee's career development is an important thing to discuss in a performance appraisal.

Either of the two types of developmental goals listed above may involve training. In the first case, if a deficiency can be clearly identified as being skill-related, additional training, practice, or assistance is usually the solution. If the deficiency is more of a willingness problem than an ability problem, however, it is appropriate to set a timetable and clearly indicate what behavioral changes must be made by what time (always designate a date) in order for the employee to become compliant with expected standards. As a leader, you can say what you need to say assertively, not aggressively, to your employee. Keep your attitude, voice tone, and body language helpful, not aggressive.

Once these plans have been written and discussed, it is the leader's responsibility to see to it that they are carried out. Performance will only be enhanced in a situation in which the leader keeps the plan visible and continues to discuss it regularly with the employee. A good timeframe to revisit the plan is often ninety days. Make a note in your schedule at whatever date is appropriate and plan to follow up with the employee to discuss progress. In the interim, remember to give compliments and appropriate informal feedback on any movement in the right direction that you observe.

Performance Appraisal as One Part of a System

Formal appraisal is most effective when it is not a stand-alone activity but is one part of a performance management system. Your role as a leader is to use all the tools we have discussed to maximize the performance of each employee, thus performance management is an expected goal. Praise, appreciation, feedback, and coaching ensure that formal performance appraisal is simply the documented version of what has been verbalized all along. Because the employee knows how he or she is doing, the employee is internally motivated; the commitment and level of performance are high. Because individual performance is high, organizational performance is high. Everyone's job is more secure and more enjoyable. Your leadership actions are the key to performance improvement in your organization.

Monitoring Your Critical Performance Measures

If you are committed to improvement, you will need to be continually monitoring changes in the metrics you have chosen as indicators of your performance progress. We have already discussed the importance of collecting measurements and how it's necessary to share this information with your team. You cannot just share the information once or on an intermittent basis. Such information should be a priority and should be used as an ongoing scorecard for your team or department, allowing them to make constant adjustments and improvements. In this way quality of your product or service will improve. Customers increasingly have options of where to buy, so only the organization that stresses high quality of output is competitive in today's business world.

What is Quality?

Quality has many meanings, but fundamentally it refers to a product (or service) with high value that will perform as it is supposed to perform and continue performing through its expected lifetime. Therefore, any behaviors, processes, and relationships within an organization which support quality of output are part of total quality. Quality is customer-driven and centers on all activities which help meet the customer's expectations. Broadly defined, this can, literally, mean anything and everything in the organization. If you are making use of a balanced scorecard, by which you take different measures of your team's progress, you will have the metrics you need to examine quality improvements in not just product, but people and processes too.

Producing high quality products is a result of many activities in the organization. A commitment to quality must begin at the top and, to be effective, must involve considerable employee participation. Technical and administrative workers are in a position to recommend modifications that can improve the quality of output. Whatever system of quality assurance is in operation at your organization, one common principle should be operating*: maintaining quality is a continuous improvement process; it is never completed.* Well-trained and committed leaders are one essential ingredient in achieving high quality.

Quality results from having a vision—a dream of being outstanding or being the best. To embrace quality, leaders and organizations must learn to think long-term. Cutting corners to save a few dollars here and there may increase short-term profit, but at what cost? Customers will soon discover the flaws, lose confidence in the product or service, and buy elsewhere. When you create a commitment to quality—doing your very best every single time—no exceptions—and demonstrate it by your behavior, others will follow your lead.

Applying the Lessons of Quality Improvement

The work of W. Edwards Deming has been fundamental in the modern quality movement in the United States, indeed in the world. His ideas about quality were based on the notion that no process or product is ever perfect, and we can and should continue to make adjustments. Even small modifications can often have a big cumulative impact on the overall system. Continuous small improvements, wherever we can make them, are the key to quality.

One of the lessons Deming and other quality pioneers taught us is that an emphasis on quality, rather than slowing productivity, actually improves it. The reason is there are fewer mistakes throughout the system and less need for rework and correcting errors. With fewer mistakes we make better use of time and materials, therefore controlling costs. In addition to increased productivity, with increased quality also comes greater market share and profitability, making everyone's job more secure. These are powerful reasons why commitment to quality must pervade every level of the organization.

Using a Problem-Solving Analysis to Improve Your Team's Quality

When you examine the metrics you have been collecting and analyze progress, it will be important to look below the surface as you try to solve problems that arise in your processes, or try to anticipate and prevent future problems. Normally, better solutions are reached by having a team of people work together than having one person tasked with finding solutions. For this reason, your team or a subgroup of it, again, should be part of the problem-solving process.

It is helpful to have a formula for attacking a problem. The formula below can be useful to your team:

Step 1. Define the problem accurately

Step 3. Brainstorm and investigate causes

Step 2. Apply a temporary solution, if needed

Step 4. Develop and implement best solution

Step 5. Monitor progress

Step 6. Reward improvements and continue to adjust

Step 1: Good problem-solving cannot be done without an adequate definition of the problem. If you state the problem correctly, this will open up the discussion of causes as well as help to generate better long-term solutions. A vaguely stated problem may not focus everyone's attention on the same issue. The problem statement, however, should not be used to assume the cause of the problem. For example, we could state an absenteeism problem in the following ways:

A. XYZ Company is having a problem with absenteeism.
B. XYZ Company had more absenteeism in the second quarter due to implementing the new computer system.
C. The Commercial Division of XYZ Company has experienced 33% more absenteeism in the second quarter of this year when compared with absenteeism throughout last year.

Statement A is too imprecise to be helpful, and Statement B presumes to know the cause of the problem. Don't assume you know the cause right away until you investigate and gather data. It is obvious that Statement C is precise without assuming too much; it gives everyone the same information.

Step 2: If something must be done immediately as a stop-gap measure, decide what sort of short-term fix will be used. In most cases, the organization cannot afford to shut down its operations until a permanent solution can be implemented. So it's important to cover this step, but it's equally important not to stop here and think the problem is fixed. Make a commitment to try to have a permanent solution in place by some reasonable date.

Step 3: We previously talked about brainstorming and the steps involved. Doing a causal analysis of a problem is an excellent application of this technique. What do team members believe may be the root cause of the problem? Record everyone's ideas, then have the group examine data which would apply to each possible cause or collect data if none are presently available.

The team will need time to collect this data (perhaps a week, perhaps a month, perhaps longer—depending on the situation) and will need to schedule another meeting to review the findings. At that time, evidence will be presented and the team can prioritize by a voting process what it thinks are the most significant causes of the problem. The team must eliminate some of the possible causes in order to focus its effort on the two or three most significant causes.

Step 4: Choose and implement a solution only when you have sufficiently investigated the causes. The team must be clear about what criteria the solution must meet. For example, if there are budget restrictions, thinking of a solution that will exceed the budget is pointless. The leader also needs to clarify other policy considerations that any acceptable solution must take into account.

Once you have decided on the solution, the team should break it into action steps, get approval if needed, and implement. Communicate the new solution clearly and be sure everyone understands. If there was a temporary solution in place, be sure you are clear when the permanent solution begins and the temporary solution is discontinued.

Step 5: If you stop after Step 4, you will miss the opportunity to embed your problem-solving in the continuous improvement process. Step 5 allows you to continue monitoring the solution, document progress or identify new problems that may have resulted from your solution, and continue to refine the solution you implemented. We must remember that a problem, once solved, is not forever solved. We can sometimes solve one problem, but create another one. This means continuous improvement is needed.

Step 6: Don't forget to recognize and reward the people who made the solution possible. Everyone deserves praise and thanks when they have successfully solved a problem. This will make it more likely that your team will be willing to tackle and solve additional problems in the future.

When you first begin to analyze and solve problems, your team may be unaccustomed to such participation and to offering solutions. They may be somewhat hesitant at first, but they will become better problem-solvers if you continue to involve them in quality issues and in developing solutions. Solving problems together builds teamwork and loyalty.

The Organization as a System

An organization can be thought of as a living system; such a system cannot stand still. As with all living systems, it must continue to grow and develop or it will die. The organization is impacted by its external environment, and many of those external factors are not under the organization's direct control. It is possible, however to control many aspects of the internal environment. As a leader, you have some opportunity here.

Because the internal parts of the organization are highly integrated, even small changes in one part of the organization have a ripple effect throughout the system. It's easy to underestimate and assume that changes in one department or one process have very little to do with another department or project down the hall or across the country, but there is an indirect and, perhaps unanticipated, effect from even small changes. Be open to comments and communication with peers in other parts of the organization. Each of the changes you make has an impact on the quality of output, good or bad. That is one reason we must be continually vigilant in our effort to improve quality and refine our processes.

An Organizational Commitment to Quality

Quality will not result from relegating the duties of "quality assurance" exclusively to one person or department. Quality is everyone's business and must be built into all steps of the process. Employees who take pride in their work produce a quality product, and they *will* take pride in their work if they are treated well and valued by the organization using the principles we have been discussing during this course.

Organizational characteristics that help promote quality are:

- Emphasizing quality above speed of output; although we don't want quality to result. in "analysis paralysis," it's important to seek a balance.
- Making tough short-term decisions that improve the long-term expectations.
- Having the proper resources: raw materials, equipment, time, personnel, and knowledge.
- Giving employees praise rather than telling them only about things that are wrong.
- Cutting through the red tape to get the job done faster.
- Giving workers more direct access to the customers to encourage their commitment to serving those customers.
- Working closely with other teams (internal customers) to achieve organizational goals rather than competing internally.
- Having leaders throughout the organization who are committed to employees and committed to empowering them.
- Having top leaders committed to quality and integrity.
- Making sure employees receive needed training.
- Maintaining high standards in all organizational processes.
- Adhering strictly to those internal processes *every* time.

As a leader committed to quality you must do your part to set the example:

- Concentrate on results.
- Communicate quality goals regularly.
- Manage employees through coaching to improve their commitment and morale.
- Give employees credit and praise; if they make mistakes, hold them accountable for their mistakes without criticizing them personally.
- Always set an example by not cutting corners on quality.
- Remember that quality is a process, not a program; it is never finished and needs continuous adjusting.

Incremental Versus Breakthrough Change

Quality improvement is not dependent on breakthrough change. High-magnitude change may take place periodically in your organization and may well be needed to keep up with innovations and competition in your field. However, you need not labor with the assumption that quality improvement means making major revisions. Continuous improvement refers to small daily or weekly adjustments that will, over time, have a significant cumulative impact on total quality. It is up to every leader to be sure that people do not rest on their laurels but that they are ever-vigilant in trying to identify and implement small adjustments. Your employees are where quality begins, but they are unlikely to speak up or to take initiative unless you reinforce this kind of attitude. It is up to you to preach continuous incremental improvements.

We All Have Customers

Customer service is highly related to quality because customers are often looking for and expecting high quality. For many years now, we have known that organizations that operate with a mission of service to their customers are more profitable in the long-run than those that ignore customers. Everyone in the organization, from the clerk to the production worker, from the janitor to the engineer, from the mail clerk to the manager, has customers. Everyone! Whoever you provide information, materials, products, or services for is your customer.

Some people within the organization deal directly with outside customers. Some may deal mainly with inside customers—that is, other people and teams within the organization—and have only indirect contact with end users outside the organization. In an organization committed to high performance, everyone must be concerned with serving their customers at all levels, whoever those customers are. In today's competitive world, it is no longer enough to provide adequate service. We must strive to provide exceptional service, even anticipating the customers' needs.

The Internal Customer

In a teamwork atmosphere, each team has clearly defined goals. These goals must be aligned with the overall goals of the organization. In order for things to run smoothly inside the organization, the goals of each team or department should not be competitive with other teams but should instead be cooperative and complementary. This is a new concept in many companies. This type of culture, however, will better support the overall organizational goals without the destructive element of internal group fighting.

In organizations where there is a great deal of individual, team, or departmental competitiveness, most employees are working primarily for themselves or their unit; in most cases, this does not serve the organization's goals first and foremost. Such a competitive culture is built on the notion that if you reach your goals, then I won't reach mine, as if there was only so much profit or business to go around. A cooperative culture is one which is built on the idea that there is potentially an unlimited amount of business. All teams and individuals can and will achieve their goals, and they will achieve them more fully by helping each other to do so.

In a traditional organization, employees of one department pretty much did their job with little communication or interaction with the department that performed the next step in the process. There was often considerable misunderstanding of what other departments did, "why it took them so long," and a general feeling of mistrust for each other. This structure is sometimes referred to as a silo structure where each department has walls around it that insulate it from other departments, making communication and collaboration difficult. All these sentiments served to slow down the work flow and delay responsiveness to the external customer.

Today organizations can no longer afford not to speak to each other internally. Employees and teams need to be trained and encouraged by their leaders to come up with ways to better work together internally. Initiatives that improve communications and relationships between teams, units, and departments infuse team spirit throughout the organization, thus improving workflow. Many companies have antiquated reward and recognition structures which still reward people or teams for doing better than others internally, thus fostering competitiveness rather than collaboration and service. When employees are rewarded for standing on their own and being the shining star, they are less likely to cooperate and share information and resources with others, even if the company now gives lip service to the idea that cooperation and teamwork is what it wants.

Cross-functional teams whose purpose is to solve organizational problems are an excellent way to increase understanding and collaboration. Learning more about the jobs and responsibilities of other departments is very important in promoting an "all of us" attitude rather than a "we/them" attitude. Instead of spending efforts to compete with each other, productive effort that is channeled into cooperation and service to each other results in greater gain for all. Teamwork and good communication skills foster an organizational culture that improves internal customer service. The external customer is positively impacted by outstanding internal customer service.

Serving Internal Customers with Servant Leadership

If you consider everything you do in a typical day or week, you will probably recognize that you have many internal customers. Certainly all of your employees are your customers. You provide information, support, and resources to help them do their jobs. If you are good at "serving" them by providing what they need, then they can perform their jobs well with no excuses. This perspective is in contrast to the way we have generally thought of the leader-follower relationship, where followers were there to serve and do the bidding of the leader.

The model of leadership we have been developing through this course, however, fits well with a newer way of thinking of leadership: *servant leadership*. A good leader should look for ways to serve employees. When you go out of your way to be of service to your employees, this improves the relationship and increases their internal motivation to work hard. They will generally give you everything they've got in appreciation if you have gone out of your way to assist them. People appreciate being treated like this. Most seldom get outstanding treatment, so their commitment and dedication will grow dramatically.

"Serving" is an attitude. A leader who uses power or domineering tactics generally finds employees will do no more than they have to. By contrast, a leader who is caring and works hard to remove obstacles so employees can do their jobs will have employees who are highly motivated and turn in outstanding performance. This is the kind of leader who treats people with compassion and respect. Leading in a culture committed to service requires more humility and better relationships with employees than the leader of the past. It requires the leader to give up the trappings of power and never use the power of position to force an issue. The end result, however, is increased performance and commitment. If this is what you want to accomplish as a leader, adopting an attitude of service toward all your customers is essential.

The External Customer

The end user of your product or services is your obvious customer. Customers generally have a host of places where they can get their products or services. Many workers in your organization, however, have only indirect contact with external customers. But the contribution they make internally to each other, to quality and efficiency, greatly impacts the finished product or service, thus impacting the customer, the customer's level of satisfaction, and the amount of repeat business.

More notably, however, those employees who deal directly with external customers are in a key role. Their *service* can make or break the organization. It has been said that companies can no longer compete on products or services: You develop something new and the next minute a competitor offers the same thing. The only real distinction to be made is between companies that cut corners and those that follow-through with their customers, offering outstanding service after the transaction and working to maintain good relationships and loyalty. It takes time to cultivate a loyal customer. However, it takes much more time and money to develop a new customer than it does to keep the loyal one that you have. Therefore, you want to do everything possible to treat current customers well.

The key to developing external customers is building trusting relationships. Customer service reps and salespeople must work hard to not just meet but *exceed* the expectations of the customer. Every single person on your staff who has any contact with the outside customer should proactively work towards building trust and respect. If you have very smart and technically-gifted people on your staff whose customer relationships are not the best, you need to look at this situation carefully and take some action. To your customer, the person who represents your organization in the simplest transactions IS your organization. Doing nothing to correct a service situation is a big mistake and is not an option for a leader.

If you have employees who alienate or irritate customers, you have three choices: 1) coach and train your staff in customer service; 2) reassign offending staff to a no direct contact role; or 3) stop serving that customer. Option #1 makes the most sense because it will have the most positive impact on the company and on the individual. This is a clear example in which developmental performance goals should be used. Helpful and professional dealings with the customer keep the customer loyal and encourage repeat business. Building a relationship with customers is based on the same foundation skills we have been discussing throughout this material—good communication skills, good listening, and being open to feedback. If customers know they can depend on the supplier to meet their needs with quality products or services and follow-up after the sale, they will keep coming back.

The reverse is also true. When customers believe they have been unfairly treated, not only will they go somewhere else for their purchases but studies show they will often go out of their way to tell others about their negative experience. An unhappy customer will tell two or three times as many people as a happy customer will. Without the external customer, no one inside your organization will have a job very long. So it is everyone's responsibility to please the external customer. Your increasing emphasis on quality in every part of the business will have a positive customer impact, too.

For internal team leaders and members, this external customer may seem far away, but your very existence depends on that customer. If you fail to provide good service internally, this may result in poor quality products; product delays; or inability to meet the customer's needs for modifications. These things occur much more frequently when people do not work together well internally and do not go out of their way to help co-workers do their jobs.

Customers may forgive a rare mistake if they have a good relationship with your company, and if you go out of your way to correct the mistake. Any time there has been a mistake or a delay, you must do everything possible to correct the situation, even if it costs you money. When a mistake occurs, it's important to try to do a causal analysis and find out where the error occurred. This is an example of continuous improvement in action and reflects positively on your customer service and your profits.

If too many of these kinds of mistakes occur, the customer will go elsewhere—somewhere where he/she can get better service or a better quality product that meets more of his/her needs. Loss of key customers can substantially reduce profits or even put the business—and therefore everyone's job—in jeopardy.

Personalizing Your Customer Relationships

The leader needs to be always mindful that everyone in the organization must serve the customer because ultimately it is the customer or end user who will determine the health of the company. Directly and indirectly, customer service is everyone's business.
One way to develop strong relationships with your customers is to make them "real" to your employees. When your people don't know the names or faces of their customers, it's easier not to worry as much about what those customers think. They don't really know who these people are, except by a company or department name, so it does not mean as much personally to them.

Companies who take the time to get to know their customers well develop very loyal customers. Make it your job as a leader to find out how your company works with its customers. Seek out opportunities for how you and your team can be involved more directly with the customers you serve. Some companies can and do regularly invite customers to their facility to see their operations, meet key personnel, problem-solve any difficulties, and anticipate any future developments that will affect both organizations. This is an excellent strategy.

Another effective way to personalize the customer for yourself and/or your employees is to go to their facility. If leaders and team members can visit good customers, they can view their operations, see how their product or service is used, and develop relationships with key people there. Meeting people face-to-face is a wonderful way to develop strong strategic alliances that meet the needs of both parties.

If the location of the customer makes it difficult for you to travel to the customer's facility, regular phone contact, even by conference calls or video conferencing, is an excellent idea. Learn to know key contacts by name and work to establish open dialog between you. Cultivate a relationship where they will let your organization know of any problems before they become large ones, while they can be easily corrected and before they threaten your customer-vendor relationship. Be proactive in seeking information from your customers. Regularly ask them for feedback on how you are doing in meeting their needs.

It's Just Not Working

Despite your best efforts as a leader to do what you have been learning in this course (to provide adequate instruction and focus on the positive aspects of employee behavior in order to build a solid relationship), there may be times when an employee does not respond. There are a number of reasons for this lack of progress, many of which may not be under your control. The employee may dislike the work, team members, you, or the organization as a whole. The employee may simply be unable to learn the skills or job requirements. Or, he/she may have personal problems or poor work habits that are lowering job performance. When it becomes apparent that the employee cannot or will not make progress, it is important for the leader to confront this behavior rather than letting it go on and on. Failure to do so is an abdication of leadership, and causes others to lose respect for you.

Rules for Positive Confrontation

Avoiding confronting the issue when you have an employee that needs improvement and simply assuming it will get better is not the answer. In fact, chances are good that the situation will only get worse if you avoid it. This is a delicate situation, because employees sometimes get their feelings hurt when corrected. Hurt feelings may result in anger or a bad attitude ("I'll get back at that so-and-so!"). Many leaders put off having a confrontation because it is not pleasant; it is, however, much easier to deal with the situation when the problem is still small. Avoiding negative reactions from an employee you confront will depend on how well you have put into practice all the skills we have discussed up to this point.

Some confrontation comes with the leadership role. Assertiveness is essential, so take a deep breath and just say it; you may not be well-suited for leadership if you can't speak up. On the flip side, if you love confronting, it is likely that your communications are too aggressive. You can make a confrontation with a challenging employee positive rather than resorting to an aggressive display of temper which potentially can degrade the employee, yourself, or the organization. Remember the following suggestions as you prepare for such a discussion:

- Deal with the problems early on. When problem behaviors become entrenched, not only is it less likely you can truly help the employee improve, but it also does damage to morale on the team. Others see the difficult employee getting away with things they don't do, and this creates resentment.
- Focus on the behavior; don't attack the person personally. There is no need to try to demean the employee or "put him in his place." This creates additional friction. Simply and assertively discuss the problem behavior. If need be, write down a few notes and practice what you will say to the employee before your meeting.
- Listen to the employee. There may actually be some explanation or something you may have missed. Has the employee had adequate training or resources? Does she understand the standards? Ask for your employee's side of the story, and then use your best listening skills.
- Explain the proper behavior. Explain exactly what is expected and how it differs from the current behavior. Explain why the employee's current behavior is unacceptable—how it affects you, the team, or the organization.

- Give them a date by which compliance is expected, and then follow up with them on that date to discuss progress.

Delivering a Positive Confrontation

If you have put the skills in this course into practice, they have enabled you to build a level of trust and respect with your team. If you have tried to be more positive and encouraging, provided good instruction, asked for their participation, given FAST feedback, and listened well to their concerns, an employee is much more likely to accept correction and advice from you. You should approach such a meeting with the attitude of wanting to help. You want to enable the employee and the team to perform better, thereby increasing the value of your leadership. If your goal is to "put the employee in his or her place," you will not be able to conduct a positive confrontation. The goal of a confrontation should be getting the employee to improve his/her behavior without having the employee get angry, violent, plan revenge, or be completely demoralized. You can turn a confrontation into a positive experience by following the rules below:

- Step 1. Say what you saw or heard that was unacceptable.
  "I saw you smoking in the restricted area."

- Step 2. Explain why this is unacceptable.
  "You know the rules about this kind of thing."

- Step 3. Deliver some kind of compliment.
  "You are one of my best technicians, and the others look to you as an example."

- Step 4. Explain what is expected instead.
  "You need to follow all safety rules to the letter."

- Step 5. Ask the employee a question, so the confrontation becomes a dialogue, not a lecture.
  "Tell me what's going on with you."

Deliver your positive confrontation by being firm and business-like; don't deliver it in an angry tone of voice. If you are assertive rather than aggressive, you will affect a more positive outcome. It's also a good idea to have the employee repeat to you what he/she will do differently as a way of summarizing and ending the discussion.

When to Initiate Corrective Action

The ideas offered in this course are not meant to imply that leaders should ignore bad behavior or poor job performance. Quite the opposite! Patience can and should only be carried so far. If you always begin a disciplinary process with kindness, most will respond. However, there are some employees who simply cannot or will not respond, despite your efforts with coaching and positive confrontations. They may be able and have the skills but continue to be unwilling. Or they may be neither willing nor able. If you can honestly say that you have given the person adequate instruction and encouragement and have given specific information on needed improvements by using positive confrontation in the manner described above, it is time to become very task-focused and move to the next level of discipline. It's time to acknowledge that this employee is probably not going to work out.

Corrective action often refers to addressing skill deficiencies and job performance issues that are more serious and habitual. It also refers to plans that address rule violation. In some organizations, this process may be called "Progressive Discipline." Whatever it is called in your organization, use your terminology, but the principles remain the same.

Corrective action is most effective when it is used in conjunction with FAST feedback and positive confrontations. The leader should be specific when describing the behavior or performance issue in question. If you have used a positive confrontation first (as discussed in the previous section), the need for a corrective action plan will not come as a surprise to the employee. He or she has been verbally corrected and instructed already. Corrective action is simply a more structured and formal way of delivering and documenting feedback that the employee has already received one or more times about the need for improvement.

Issues that may be addressed with corrective action plans include:

- Continued deficient job performance regarding quality or quantity of output
- Repeated mistakes on the same tasks
- Frequent tardiness
- Frequent absences
- Continued violation of rules (excessive breaks, visiting with coworkers, cursing, or displays of temper)
- Violent or threatening behaviors
- Violation of safety rules
- Poor conduct with customers
- Other inappropriate behaviors

Steps in the Corrective Action Process

Obviously, if you have a company policy for corrective action, those policies should be followed. Seek out help from the proper sources in your organization, such as your HR department or the person who handles such matters. You will want to consider the specifics of your own organization's policies and the steps involved.

Corrective action or progressive discipline generally involves at least three steps, and sometimes four:

1) Documentation of a verbal warning. You may have had one or more coaching conversations with employees prior to the beginning of formal discipline. Always inform the employee that you are documenting and that formal corrective action has

been initiated. This means **write down what you said, to whom, why the behavior is an issue, and date and sign it**. Verbally deliver this warning, and, if possible, have the employee sign and date the warning also. You have simply written down your conversation with the employee. File this in a safe and confidential place.

If the problem continues…

2) Issue a written warning, date it, and sign it. Deliver this to the employee in hard copy and keep a copy for your file. It should clearly say: This is your final warning. Again, state the exact problem, state the behavior that is expected instead, and say that if the behavior in question does not improve by a certain date, you may have to terminate the employee.

   If the problem persists…

3) Some companies use forced leave (example, three days' suspension). Other companies omit this step and proceed to the final step if the problem is not corrected.

4) Terminate them. The leader should call the offending employee in and speak privately. You can ask, "Do you know what I'm about to say?" By this time, they often realize they are simply not a good fit with the organization. You should explain that their performance has given you no choice but to terminate them. Try to remain calm and civil, and even wish them the best for the future. You may wish to escort them to their locker or their desk to retrieve personal items and walk them to the door.

The steps taken or omitted may be partially dependent on the severity of the offense. Your organization may have several different classifications of offenses. If so, you should be familiar with what they are and act accordingly.

At each step, make sure the employee knows what will happen next if there is no improvement. All these steps sound like a lot of trouble, and much of this may sound like it is unnecessary. After all, many organizations are built on an attitude of trust and trying to treat people right and the legal doctrine of employment at will. This is certainly a good thing, as ***Managing Technical Employees*** has emphasized. Unproductive employees, however, cannot be allowed to continue their employment. Their behavior may carry over to other employees, and it certainly negatively impacts morale.

Employment law differs, however, from state to state and country to country. The law often comes down on the side of the individual employee and against the organization whenever there is a question of interpretation. In some areas an employer can be accused of wrongful discharge and made to pay unemployment payments, back wages, or even reinstate an employee. This is much less likely to happen if you have protected yourself by ***documenting*** (writing down) the progressive steps you have taken. You will be on even safer ground if you have records of the employee's performance from written performance appraisals. Even documentation as informal as 30-, 60-, and 90-day reviews in which the leader writes a paragraph about job performance and yearly reviews after that may be sufficient. *But something must be written indicating the problem and the steps you have taken to correct it.*

If an employee is terminated and there is nothing in the records showing job performance problems and efforts the organization made to help the employee improve, the company could face legal action. It is crucial that leaders at all levels of the organization be made aware of how serious and costly employee legal action can become. Proper documentation takes only a few extra minutes at each step, but it can save countless hours and a great deal of money.

A New View of Conflict

When people work together, there will be some conflict. Period. Even leaders who are good at promoting teamwork and encouraging their followers will deal with occasional conflict. This is natural and normal. The key is not to avoid conflict; the key is dealing with conflict productively. Many people avoid conflict at all costs—they run at the first sign. Others deal with conflict by trying to squelch it with an iron fist. Still others just let the complaining employee have his/her way because it's easier. But as we have already learned, either being too aggressive or too passive is ineffective for a leader.

Some conflict is good. We need some conflicting ideas, some disagreement, to force us to work harder for better solutions. Instead of getting mad or frustrated, a leader who displays open and assertive behaviors in dealing with conflict is able to encourage the same behavior in followers. The leader can utilize the passion and increased energy in a conflict to achieve solutions while avoiding the negative effects of warfare at work.

The leader cannot control followers, and when a dispute arises between two employees, it is the leader's responsibility to make sure things do not get out of hand. It's important to remember that both conflicting employees probably feel that they are right or justified. In fact, chances are they both have some good points in their favor. Seldom is one person completely wrong and the other completely right in any conflict.

When to Intervene

If there is a slight personality conflict or a small tiff, it is often unnecessary for the leader to intervene at all. Like bickering siblings, these things may blow over. If they do not, and if they become disruptive to the team and to the workflow, then the leader needs to intervene. When conflict has become disruptive to others such that they complain or the conflict interferes with productivity and the free exchange of information, this is when the leader needs to step in. When it gets to this point, take action right away.

There are two good ways to handle this type of problem. The method you choose depends on the people involved, the issue, and your own level of comfort.

1. Talk separately and privately to each person, getting "their side of the story." Be careful not to come to any judgment before you have talked to both. Do not assign

blame but ask each of them what happened and for their ideas on how to resolve the issue in order to move on. The truth is that both of them are partly to blame so both are part of the solution. Trying to figure out "whose fault it is" is a pointless activity which does not lead to resolution.

Encourage the team members to get together and talk the problem out themselves. If they show a willingness to do so, they may take care of it themselves. The leader may only need to be the catalyst in initiating such a conversation.

2. If disputing employees are reluctant to get together alone, the leader may need to set up a meeting between the three of you (two conflicting parties and the leader) in which the leader serves as a mediator. As the leader you will need to be the neutral third party. The following tips will help you conduct such a meeting.

Serving as the Third Party Mediator

Hold the meeting in a private place with ample time allowed. Ask the disputing employees to face each other and talk to each other, not to you. Explain the ground rules of the discussion:

a) Take turns.
b) Face each other when you speak.
c) Listen to each other with respect and *without interrupting*
d) Follow the Three Step Process outlined below

Only three basic steps are needed for moving a conflict toward a positive resolution. This is called the Three Step Process and the steps are:

1. **One person tells their story while the other listens respectfully without interrupting.** [Enforce this rule absolutely!]. Draw straws for who will go first. Making people listen to each other often solves a lot of problems. The leader should summarize the speaker's position impartially when he/she finishes. When the first one is finished, the other gets a turn and is afforded the same respectful listening.

2. **The other person gets to tell their story while the first speaker listens without interrupting.** Again, the leader can summarize this person's concerns. Thank both of them for their honesty.

3. **Problem solve together with everyone contributing ideas for possible solutions.** Begin this step with establishing common ground, such as what both parties want. [Example: I know you both want to do a good job and want to settle this disagreement so you have less tension at work.] Then get them to rainstorm possible solutions. List these on a whiteboard or flip chart so that everyone can see them. Remember, there are usually many different ways to solve a problem, not just the two extreme positions the parties want. What are the possible steps in between their positions? Better still, what are the possible creative solutions that would address both their concerns?

Step 3 may be challenging. It may involve one of two things: a *creative solution* or a *compromise*. The creative solution is best. Using all three of your heads, think of something that is different from either position but satisfactory to each. Ask yourself, "What *other* things might work here? Is there a way to incorporate both of your concerns? How many possible ideas can we come up with?" This way neither person feels like they are having to give up their interests.

A compromise is an acceptable solution, although it is less than ideal because both people feel like they have to *give up* something. A compromise finds a solution that is halfway between their positions. Strive to find a creative solution first; then settle for a compromise that both can agree to if you cannot find a creative solution.

Proceed through the Three Step Process, with the leader stepping in calmly if needed to keep things from getting too emotional or adversarial.

For formal grievances or allegations and issues of a legal or serious nature, do not try to deal with these alone. Ask your manager and your Human Resources specialists to be involved and to provide guidance. Many conflicts can be resolved in-house. For difficult conflicts, you may want to consider bringing in a professional mediator. Observe that person carefully and learn from what he/she does.

The Goal of Conflict Management

The goal is to find a solution that both parties can live with and agree to accept. In this way you will restore order to the workplace and dispel the bad feelings that have kept your team members from being their most productive. You may think you "don't have time" to deal with the conflict. But the truth is that you simply don't have time *not* to. Personality conflicts and different viewpoints on work issues can become deep-seated and can sap the energy from the team as team members spend more and more time thinking of ways to defend their position or get back at the offensive person rather than doing their jobs.

As conflict escalates, more people often become involved, taking sides and, thus, taking even more time and energy from the job tasks. Taking a couple of hours to clear the air can more than make up for the time lost due to the ongoing conflict. To be most effective, the leader must be willing to intervene early and contain the conflict before it spreads to the entire team.

Conflict among the Team

Parts of the team or the whole work group may be involved in a conflict. It's not unusual for a group of intelligent, talented, and highly motivated employees to be very much at odds on an issue. Perhaps the leader did not see it coming, and it has suddenly involved everyone. People may take one of two sides in the conflict, or maybe everyone has a different opinion on the issue. Such conflicts can result from many things, including misunderstandings, different personality styles, different priorities, disagreement over responsibilities, different views on an organizational issue, or different styles of working and performing tasks. All these are potential sources of conflict. When the conflict becomes full-blown and is disrupting the work of the entire team, this calls for rapid positive intervention by the leader. There are several ways to effectively handle this:

1. Have a group meeting in which everyone gets three-to-five minutes to tell their story around the table, using the above rules (Use Steps 1 and 2 under ***Serving as the Third Party Mediator***). Enforce the rule of "no interrupting." This can be very helpful because team members feel like they were "heard." Then the group can problem-solve together for a solution.

2. Have the team discuss as a group: a) what the team's mission or purpose is (the leader should help them think in terms of what is ideal, not just the current stated goals); b) how the team is currently performing (badly); and c) what they need to do to get where they want to go. This may mean developing action goals for each person present.

3. For some team conflicts, the leader could have the team write a "Start, Stop, and Continue" for each other person. Do this by passing out a sheets of paper to each team member, enough sheets for one less than the number of people on the team (if the team has eight people, pass out seven sheets of paper to each person). Ask each person to write the name of a different team members at the top of each sheet. They will write the names of everyone except themselves. Each team member will complete three sentence stems for each other member. Here is an example of what team members might say for Bill, with sentence stems in the left column:

    I wish Bill would start… speaking up.

    I wish Bill would stop… holding disagreements in.

    I wish Bill would continue… being willing to answer my computer questions.

Pass around envelopes with names of team members, so that others can put their comments for that team member in the envelope. With eight members on the team, each person will receive seven sheets of feedback. Give the members a few minutes to read these privately and then ask them to make general comments on what they learned and what they will do differently.

The leader should carefully control the tone of the group and be sure that people speak respectfully to each other. Compliment and thank those who are trying to work things out or who present helpful ideas. Whatever techniques you choose, a positive group meeting to clear the air is an important step. Avoiding such a meeting will only allow the disagreement to continue to fester.

After conflict and successful resolution, a team is often strengthened and will work even better together than before. After this kind of meeting and development of agreements for actions or individual action plans, the leader should expect better compliance and cooperation. It's also important to model better compliance and cooperation to the team and reward those who are working for that objective.

What If You Are the One Involved in the Conflict?

If you, the leader, are involved in a conflict with one of your employees or with a peer, you can use the Three Step Process to resolve most such differences. When you are one of the conflicting parties, there is one critical rule you must remember in order to effectively resolve the conflict.

1. Take the initiative at a time when you are calm and go to the other party in the conflict. Tell them you want things to be better between you, and specifically *ask them to explain their side of the story first.* Be sure you listen carefully and do *not* get defensive or interrupt them! Your first task must be to be quiet and listen; do not respond or interrupt until they have fully told you everything. It may take several minutes or more for them to say all they want to say on the subject. Let them say it all without interruption, even if you are attacked. This is the critical rule—always ask the other person to talk first. Otherwise, the Three Step Process becomes another back and forth argument and will not work.

2. After you have heard them and summarized their concerns and feelings, then ask them if you can tell them your side of the situation. If you have been a good listener yourself in Step 1, they will rarely deny you the opportunity to speak.

3. Look for points of agreement and problem-solve: How can we make positive changes in the current situation or how can we work together better in the future and avoid conflict?

A simple way to remember these steps is: *1) you speak (the other person always goes first); 2) I speak; 3) we solve.*

Choose the time and place for such a discussion carefully. Make sure you are calm, you have a private place, and you are not catching the other person at a stressful time. It's a good idea to make an appointment to speak with the other person. If the leader is both assertive and a good listener, he or she can positively manage nearly every conflict—those in which the leader is personally involved and those where the leader is an outside party.

Why Is Change Often Unpleasant?

As we noted earlier in this course, change is an undeniable part of our working lives. However, instead of being a “victim” who is overcome by change, a leader who has used these techniques with technical, professional, or administrative employees is in a position to lead and stay in front of change. Such a leader can effectively guide employees through change and encounter less resistance.

Most people are somewhat uncomfortable with change. Most of us develop comfort with our habits, and habits are hard to break. Brain research reveals some of the reason for this: habitual behavior travels through well-worn neural pathways in the brain, making habits automatic. If we try to change our behavior—our habits—we must be thoughtful, focused, and purposeful in order to develop a new neural pathway. Developing a new habit may take three weeks of conscious effort at minimum, and more if the habit is complex. So, to some degree, we are programmed to be creatures of habit with brains that resist change. An open attitude and willingness to consider change, however, can help us develop new patterns more easily.

The sense of uncertainty and lack of control that often accompany change also produce anxiety. Studies show, though, that a little anxiety is good; it causes us to be on our toes and prevents us from becoming complacent. A little bit of anxiety can motivate us to perform at our best; it can give us the incentive and motivation to make a needed change. But too much anxiety can paralyze people with fear. A good example of this is when word of a big change, such as a major layoff or company closing, gets out and people are in a state of shock. This is too much anxiety to be motivating, and attitude and performance both suffer greatly when there is great anxiety.

The key to successfully leading change, then, is to try to create slight anxiety to take advantage of the motivation that is generated when people are slightly uncomfortable. To create too much anxiety will overwhelm people, and the leader will encounter great resistance. The applies both to making a change in our own personal behavior and in helping employees and others to change.

People are most afraid of change when the change is:

1) Unexpected
2) Seriously threatening
3) Out of their control

There are a number of things leaders can do, however, to keep change in the manageable range—where there is enough anxiety to be motivating but not overwhelming. If you keep the above three reasons people fear change in mind, you can eliminate a great many problems by using the following three simple strategies:

1) Give them some warning—so change is not as unexpected.
2) Emphasize how the change is beneficial—so it does not seem as threatening.
3) Allow them to participate in determining how the change will look—so it's not totally out of their control.

We will talk more about these ideas below. First, let's discuss how the mental adjustment to change actually occurs.

The Change Process

First and foremost, leaders must recognize that *change is a process*. It is not an event! An event is the company picnic, the visiting dignitaries from Japan, the weekly team meeting. An event has a narrowly defined beginning and a clear end (although preparation is often required ahead of the actual event). A process is something longer that continues to evolve over time and has a fuzzy beginning and end, if it ends at all. A process frequently goes on and on, more like quality improvement that never ends. The more dramatic the change, the longer the change process will be.

Generally there are predictable stages in people's attitude and behavior as they are involved in a significant change. These stages will finally give way to acceptance if the leader is patient. But it's important to know these mental states or moods in order to better do your job.

1) Shock and denial: "No, this can't be happening. They can't lay me off."
2) Anger: "How can they do this to m after all the work I've put in! I'll get even with them."
3) Bargaining: "Maybe we could do X and they will change their minds about selling…"
4) Sadness/sense of loss: saying goodbye to the old ways – "I'll really miss …" and "It will never be the same again." This sadness is similar to depression for some.
5) Acceptance: finally trying to make the new situation work – "Well, maybe we could try such and such…"

A leader should be sensitive to these stages and recognize that each stage has a purpose—to help people let go of the old and accept the new. Different employees will move through these phases at different rates, and some may even go back and forth between stages. Don't expect team members to embrace change overnight. It takes time and patience. As a leader you may have had quite awhile to adjust to upcoming changes because you may have known about them longer than your team. If so, don't forget that you are ahead of them.

Tips for Overcoming Resistance to Change

The leader must recognize that some resistance is natural and normal. The leader can lay the groundwork for change, however, by following the tips below to keep resistance to a manageable level. As mentioned above, people are especially resistant when change is: *unexpected, seriously threatening, and out of their control.* To reduce these problems and others, leaders should keep the following tips in mind. These actions will enable you to get more compliance when you need to institute a change.

Give them some warning. In the old-fashioned organization, management did all it could to keep bad news from employees or to keep any kind of change quiet until it was fully ready for roll-out, under the mistaken impression that they were protecting the employees. The wise thing to do for today's new leader is to keep all employees informed all the time. Is business slowing down? Is a possible change in the wind? Let them know! Employees will be much more likely to accept what ultimately comes if they have been in on the business reasons behind the decisions from the beginning. Withholding information is not protecting people—it's a bad control tactic and sets up resistance to change.

It is good advice to *never withhold information* unless you are strictly ordered to do so. People sense that something is wrong even if you are trying to hide it, and the gossip can be much more devastating than the truth. If you are asked to keep information private that you believe should be shared, go to your management and try to convince them of the wisdom of letting the news out, little by little, perhaps. Resistance will be significantly less if you trust people enough to bring them on board from the beginning. If you cannot convince decision-makers to let you tell your team, support their decision and consider how you can utilize the remainder of these tips. Your team will know, however. If they ask, rather than losing their trust, tell them you are not at liberty to give out all the information yet, and you will tell them everything as soon as you possibly can.

Emphasize how the change is beneficial. Perhaps employees have worried or complained about certain things. Perhaps they have wanted certain things to be fixed. If the change will remedy any of these problems, stress that fact. In any event, make sure they understand the rationale for the change and what it is intended to do. Will this, in some way, benefit them or make their jobs easier? If so, it's an easier sell. You can assure them that after they learn it, their work will go more smoothly. Will this change positively impact quality of output? If so, emphasize that. Will this change be of direct benefit to the customer? If so, let them know that increasing customer satisfaction means increased sales and additional job security for them.

Allow them to participate in how the change will look. Maybe they were not allowed to participate in the decision of whether to adopt the change. Maybe they would have chosen a different alternative. In many cases, a change may be announced, and employees may never have been consulted. You can still make the best of the situation, however, if you adopt a positive attitude and allow participation at whatever level is possible. Call a meeting and discuss what's going on with your team. "Okay, I realize that not everybody is happy about this, but this is one of those situations we just have to accept. We have been told we will have to do this, so we will do the best we can. Let's develop our own plan for how we will go about it." Let people share their ideas about how the change should be implemented. This way they feel like they have some control. Once they become part of the solution, they are less likely to be part of the problem.

If you don't have full information, seek out all possible information about the change for yourself. Why is it being implemented; what led up to the decision; why will the expected outcome be better with the new way; and what problems will be solved? If you have not been in on the rationale for the change, get your own manager or your manager's manager to help you understand so you can better convey this information to your own followers in a way that will help them embrace the change.

Give out all the information you have as soon as possible. Call your group together so that everyone has the same information at the same time rather than letting the grapevine do the damage. Do not withhold information. If you have been very open with the team and suddenly stop talking, they will make up their own conclusions. Share what you can as soon as you can. If the issue is very controversial, invite a member of higher management to be present to help answer questions.

Create a sense of urgency for the change by talking to them about the problems. If you talk to your team about problems first, this will help prepare team members for change. What problem(s) was this change designed to address? They will be more likely to understand why some change may be necessary. Your followers are much more likely to accept a change when they understand that one is truly needed, so always share the reasoning behind the change—long before the change is announced, if possible.

Help followers see "what's in it for me." Emphasize the advantages to your team. Remind them how it will help them individually to do their jobs better or address something they have been complaining about for awhile.

Emphasize the similarities, too. People often get so caught up in the differences of a new process or piece of equipment that they forget that much of what they are doing will remain the same. If you emphasize how the new connects with the old or retains some of the same features, it may not seem as overwhelming.

Allow the group to ventilate frustration and express worry. Answer all questions and concerns patiently but firmly, using all your good listening skills. They need some time initially to ventilate. Remember, good listening does not necessarily mean you agree. If you don't have all the information yet, say what you can and promise to provide further information just as soon as possible. Make good on that promise!

Show commitment to the change yourself. You should address your concerns to your managers, *not* your subordinates. Don't take your team's criticism personally. It is natural for people to complain and worry, "Will I be able to handle this?" "Will there still be a place for me in the newly organized company?" Reassure them and keep a positive attitude yourself. Remind the team of successful changes they have made before, and assure them they can make this one too.

Gradually encourage the group to move beyond complaining to generating solutions. Once they have let off some initial frustration, continued whining becomes counter-productive. The leader needs to gradually encourage them to focus more on solutions. If you have used a group problem-solving with them before, this is just another instance where that skill will be useful. Get them to generate positive ideas about "how to…"

Implement change in small steps, if at all possible. People respond better to gradual than dramatic change and suffer fewer aftereffects. Clearly identify what the first step is in the change and when it will happen. Your boss, board, or other decision-makers may give you a timeline; if not, set a timetable for each step in the change with the help of your team. Phasing in a change causes less resistance.

Reward and compliment those who offer ideas and begin to support the change. This will serve notice that good things happen to those who get on board with the change. For vocal resisters, give them key roles in the implementation process to help turn them around.

The Bottom Line on Change

All of the tips explained above can be summarized in one general rule: if you take the time *ahead of the* change to prepare people, you will spend less time *after the change* struggling to get them on board and monitoring their compliance. Either way you will need time to make the transition to “the new way,” but the process of change will be much smoother if you focus your efforts before, rather than after, the change.

Be patient with your employees. The momentum for change will soon be stronger than the resistance if you support the change and model flexibility for those in your sphere of influence.