

Feeling Frustrated With Your Team?

By James Holden

Want tips on how to get staff doing what they're supposed to?

Stuff ups

In most organisations there are times when staff drop the ball and don't do what they're supposed to. From the leader's perspective this can be infuriating – it lets the whole team down and leaves the leader with a fair amount of explaining to do.

Nip it in the Bud

As leaders, it's imperative you nip any undesirable workplace behaviour in the bud quickly and help your staff become part of the solution to quickly to fix the problem.

Listen and Learn

To do this, leaders need to invest time to actively listen to staff and learn what's really happening.

Do yourself a favour and avoid the hassle of asking the Why question in a negative situation e.g. Why wasn't the file sent to the client on time etc.

You will most likely end up with a shopping list of excuses. Try what and how specifically instead. These direct staff in to staying on track and providing details you can work with.

Here are some familiar reasons you may have come across:

1. I didn't understand clearly what you wanted me to do

To tackle this situation, make sure that your expectations are clear. Ponder this one: *The meaning of communication is the response you get regardless of your intention!*

So offer your instructions in several different ways – some people need to see what you mean, to hear it in just the right words, to get a good feel for it or get their heads around it. Your language needs to be tuned into their learning channel.

You'll also need to use active listening techniques to verify staff understanding. Your staff should know:

- What behaviour or performance you expect of them
- Absolute clarity of task to be performed
- How their performance will be measured
- What are the consequences of effective and ineffective behaviour

2. I didn't think it was as important as other tasks I'm working on

With ever-increasing workloads, this excuse is really common.

To turn this situation around, leaders need to ensure the priorities they hold dearly are articulated clearly.

Alarms

Set up an alarm system that will notify you early if there's going to be a problem getting the work done. This could be through project milestones and systematised project reporting to ensure commitments are met.

3. I didn't know how to do it

This usually occurs with people who are new to the role. Though, it can also happen with experienced workers who haven't done the specific task you want for quite a while. This becomes a staff development matter. Leaders need to either lead the way in showing what's expected, have the staff member shadow a more experienced person or have them undertake training to develop their capability.

4. I didn't have the resources to do it

With the best of leader intentions plans can come apart if your staff simply don't have the time, equipment or budget to effectively perform the task.

As the saying goes you can't make a silk purse out of a sow's ear.

If the task is sufficiently important leaders need to set their staff up for success by providing adequate resources.

5. I was scared – It seemed too hard

This situation gets far less airtime than it deserves.

This requires the leader asking questions to get the low down. More often than not most people are afraid of failing and being ridiculed privately by the leader or worse yet in front of others... unfortunately in the 21st century this still happens!

Leaders need to know when the gradient is too steep. In terms of motivation, it's far better to build staff up slowly with copious amounts of small wins.

No one crosses the many glaciers on Mt Everest in giant step, so it's a tad unrealistic to try this in the workplace. The way it's done is to cross on ladders one step at a time.

6. I didn't want to do it, so I didn't

Despite being marvellously well trained and with clarity of expectations, there will be times when leaders face opposition. The Japanese sign for danger is also the same sign for opportunity.

This is an opportunity to call the behaviour! The staff member has re-set the leader's original frame of expectations. This situation requires out framing. Listening carefully, playing back their words and getting really specific about their behaviour and then re-laying your expectations are the key to turning this around.

Notifying staff that such behaviour is unacceptable, the impact this is having on the team, organisation and what the likely consequences are to their career is vital.

Simply informing staff that you are disappointed can have a huge impact. Leaders need to be soft on the relationship but firm on the outcome.

Accountability and careful monitoring of performance with reinforcing positive behaviour is paramount. In most instances staff will choose to modify their behaviour and improve their performance.

In more resilient cases, informing staff that this is *strike one* can bring to bear a certain amount of gravity. If the performance still doesn't improve: This becomes a situation requiring coaching as an intervention. Leaders simply cannot afford to have underperformance or behavioural issues left unchecked in their teams.

Here's to you, turning around your team situations.