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## **Is Everyone on the Same Page?**

As simple as it may sound, both managers and those who report to them are often frustrated because of a lack of mutual understanding regarding these fundamental questions:

- Where are we going?
- What are we trying to achieve?
- What do we want from each other?

Since the answer to these questions is a prerequisite to all other management activity, lack of clarity has a detrimental effect on communication, standards of performance, control, and motivation. Until the fundamental questions are answered, all other management activity is rendered null and void.

For effective management, these questions need to be answered prior to engaging in any other management activity. They need to be answered periodically. And during times of considerable and continual change, they need to be answered more frequently.

## ***Do Negative Thoughts Keep You Up at Night?***

Several executive coaching clients report that there are occasions when they lose sleep from dwelling on something they failed to accomplish or that they considered a mistake, according to Warner B. Wims, PhD., President of WBW & Associates. This kind of self-acknowledged waste of energy, or “negative dwelling,” creates a spiral of lost opportunity and creativity—not to mention tremendous fatigue the following day.

“Negative dwelling” can be transformed into positive energy in several ways. Here are a few ideas that will help:

- Are you letting yourself down because you have established goals or standards of excellence that result in more personal “losses” than “wins?” Put another way, have you set things up so that your actions will never be good enough? Establish standards and goals that push you, but make sure they are realistic and attainable.
- Do you give more attention to your failures than your accomplishments? It is not unusual for very accomplished people to beat themselves up for mistakes or failures. Relish your accomplishments. Appreciate your unique contributions rather than comparing yourself to others. You may simply not have other people’s strengths, just as they may not have yours. Put your “mistakes” in the context of a learning experience.
- Are you preoccupied with what happened earlier in the day or yesterday, instead of what is happening in the present or what you can make happen tomorrow? Preoccupation with past events that you can’t change actually reduces your creativity, performance, effectiveness, general health, and the quality of your relationships. Focus on what is happening in the moment; this includes your physical self, mental state, environment, and others around you. Give more attention to the present and future than to the past.
- Are you taking on too much and then judging yourself for not addressing all the problems or completing all that you have set out to accomplish? Be wary of assuming too much responsibility without delegating or involving others. Everything need not be determined by you or rest on your shoulders alone. Allow others to solve problems and make decisions, and provide them with the support they need to do so.
- Do you make yourself responsible for things that are actually beyond your control? Realize and accept what is within and outside your control.
- Do you fall into a habit of assessing yourself negatively? Do you often find yourself “in a mood of negative self-assessment?” Make certain that when you evaluate yourself, you compare the facts against specific criteria and standards you have established. Don’t generalize or arrive at judgments without evidence. Use valid information to change your actions or develop needed skills.

## Consider Using Internal Focus Groups

Have you considered the value of conducting focus groups within your organization? Focus groups are an extremely effective and efficient means of gaining critical input from employees. WBW & Associates uses both face-to-face focus groups and written surveys in its work. However, we find that focus groups have the following advantages over written surveys:

- The format extracts more ideas from employees, allowing for in-depth probing behind employee suggestions. Focus groups do not constrain answers as much as written surveys.
- Focus groups provide the means to delve into the specifics and nuances of issues. For example, at American Express, focus group results helped us identify leadership and job-specific competencies and critical behaviors.
- Using experienced group process consultants, participants feel engaged and valued during the focus group experience and, therefore, feel good about what their company is trying to do.
- The process increases employee commitment to future change by signaling that employees' ideas are critical to the ongoing development of the company.
- As a socially oriented research method, focus groups feel natural to people. Participants' inhibitions are lowered and people serve as catalysts for each other's ideas.
- As we did for Bank of America, we often conduct focus groups prior to conducting a written survey in order to gather information that greatly helps with survey design. Important areas then can be explored in more depth through written surveys, if necessary. At UNICEF, we led focus groups to identify a list of potential core company values which were then selected and prioritized based on survey results.

## Balancing on a Tightrope: Directing vs. Encouraging

Imagine walking a tightrope holding a pole with "Directing People" at one end and "Encouraging People" at the other. You have to walk across this tightrope while continually adjusting both ends of the pole so that you can sustain perfect balance—and not fall off.

That is what managing others is like. Both directing too much (telling people what to do), and not directing enough (hoping that by providing people with the right resources, environment, and incentives, they'll do the right thing), will cause you to fall.

Finding the right managerial balance is crucial. What makes things so challenging, however, is that this is no simple tightrope walk in a controlled circus environment. In the business world, it's windy and situations usually change while you are in the process of walking across. Whereas at one time the balance might be correctly tilted toward directing, you may get midway across the tightrope when circumstances require you to shift more toward encouraging. How do you keep from falling? The short answer: constantly reevaluate the circumstances and your behavior, and remember that both directing and encouraging are required for effective management.

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