

Providing a Target Yields Better Results

By Kathleen J. Wheelihan

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Did you ever wonder why employees don't always get their best possible results for job performance? While there are many possible reasons, one that is simple to resolve is to start off with clear expectations for the job.

Imagine a military operation where no target has been defined. It would be almost impossible to succeed. Individuals may feel compelled to choose their own targets to feel a sense of accomplishment, or may take no action at all. They wouldn't understand how their actions fit in with the overall strategic plan of the campaign, and therefore it would be difficult to make a meaningful contribution. The same thing can happen in the workplace.

Clear expectations remove the guesswork that can cause employees to do the wrong work, do work in the wrong way, or even do no meaningful work at all. The results can be frustrating for you and your employees and can lead to greater problems such as dissatisfied customers, higher costs, lower productivity and profits, lost business, unmotivated employees, employee turnover, or worse, safety hazards and accidents, or in extreme cases, loss of life.

Expectations are given in many forms. A few of the ways supervisors and managers can provide targets for employees include:

- * Company or department mission statement;
- * Departmental and individual goals to support corporate plans;
- * Job descriptions;
- * Policies and procedures;
- * Safety standards; and
- * Leading by example.

Expectations can also be established using the following six-step process in an interactive discussion with employees:

1. Describe the job in terms of its major outcomes and how it fits into the larger picture.
2. Agree on measurable performance criteria.
3. Mutually identify necessary skills, resources, and guidelines.
4. Determine priorities.
5. Review and check for understanding and commitment.
6. Set a date for an early progress review.

Ironically, supervisors and managers are sometimes fearful that by telling employees what to do, they will alienate them or make them feel inadequate. However, more often than not, clear

expectations actually comfort employees and give them the power to get the right job done, in the right way. That is not to say that supervisors should dictate every step of the way; that only stifles creativity and eliminates the possibility of improving processes. Nor does setting expectations guarantee success every time.

But don't let these fears and risks dissuade you from providing employees with appropriate targets. Keep in mind each employee's skill, experience, education, and preferred learning and communication styles. Provide challenges within the employee's reach. With a clear target, and your coaching and feedback to improve aim and execution, you'll be amazed at how well employees can hit the mark. And that kind of success can be contagious!

Kathleen J. Wheelihan is a professional speaker and consultant for AchieveMax®, Inc., a firm specializing in custom-designed keynote presentations, seminars, and consulting services. Kathleen has made presentations ranging from creativity to customer service and leadership to teambuilding for a number of industries, including credit union, education, government, health care, manufacturing, and real estate. She can be reached at 800-886-2MAX or by visiting <http://www.AchieveMax.com>.

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