

Preventing Your Employees From Failing

By Carole Nicolaides

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Have you ever noticed what happens when you become suspicious of and unsatisfied with an employee's performance? Whether you realize it or not, you begin to create a "failure mindset" for them. With time, you stop believing in your employee and a cycle starts that revolves around low morale, low performance and deterioration of performance.

A chain reaction begins to happen with your employees once your mentality changes toward them. First they might turn in a project that has been completed improperly. In response, you reprimand them. Their self-confidence decreases which leads to a reduction in productivity. The more you discipline and chastise them, the more their motivation is undermined. When people perceive chronic disapproval or lack of confidence and appreciation they tend to shut down. While they may not verbalize to you what is happening, this behavioral phenomenon manifests itself in several ways. The syndrome is costly. But if you recognize the symptoms in time, you - as a progressive leader - are fully capable of rectifying the situation and redeeming that employee.

Let me provide an example for you. John was the President of a small company and a client of mine. He hired a new controller for his company who seemed to be a sharp, loyal and ambitious professional. Two months into the relationship John started doubting the capabilities of his controller. As we were having lunch, he communicated to me his frustration. When I asked what went wrong he answered that the controller was still not up to speed and that he failed to prepare a very important report for him last month. I asked John if he had communicated or at least found out what happened with the controller. His answer was, "I hired him for that. He was supposed to know that I needed that report for my board of directors."

You see how easy it is to create this failure mindset? With some coaching help, John was able to see what he was creating through turbulent perceptions. He communicates his expectations with his controller now and they are able to resolve issues before they accumulated into a berg of mistrust and criticism.

Before we discuss the possible solutions, let's take time to look at several things many managers try that actually make the situation worse.

Requiring approval before making decisions. Becoming stricter with your troubled employee will only aggravate the situation. With employees who suffer from low self-esteem, having someone

looking over their shoulder every step of the way is stressful and distracting. By allowing them to work on their own, you are breaking the thought pattern of "failure" and displaying the trust you have in your employee.

Watching the employee at meetings very closely. This is one of the worst things to do. Guarding every word that comes out of your employee's mouth and making negative comments in front of a group of people is very demeaning. It is also considered a "power play" and is regarded as tactless and cowardice behavior.

Avoiding face-to-face confrontations. Instead of dealing directly face-to-face with your employees you may choose to communicate your dissatisfaction or concern via email. Don't fall into that temptation. Progressive leaders make the time and effort to "do the right thing" and discuss issues in person with their employees. Granted, these discussions are no fun for anyone. However, the fact that you made time in your schedule to speak with your employee goes a long way toward showing you support them and are available to them.

Allowing your perceptions to prevail. Most of the time our perceptions about a situation are so strong that they end up becoming our reality - whether they're true or not. That can create turbulence and a string of bad decisions. During all your dealings with a troubled employee, remember that - until you have discussed a particular issue with him or her - you are basing decisions on your perception and not necessarily the facts.

Low expectations. If you expect too little from your employee and you do not present new challenges, your employee will come to doubt his or her own thinking and your confidence in them. When they lose the confidence of their manager, only negative things follow.

In addition to the "don'ts" of preventing your employees from failing, here are several preventative measures that will definitely help as well.

Become aware of this self-fulfilling failure mindset and the possibility that you might be causing the problem. Look within yourself for causes and solutions before placing the burden of responsibility where it does not fully belong.

Become actively involved with all your employees. Know what they are doing, what they are not doing. Ask questions, become personal and show that you care for them. At the beginning of your relationship talk frequently about priorities, goals and your vision.

Stop categorizing people. Sometimes, even from your enthusiasm about some of your star performers, you end up stereotyping your employees. A better method is to communicate that you believe in all of your people. Otherwise you take away the motivation that they can become the very best.

Create a safe environment in which employees feel comfortable to discuss their performance and their relationships with their direct supervisors. Give them the freedom to ask questions and even challenge their managers.

Discover what is missing. Even if you have the best performers in the world you need to constantly ascertain what has changed in your department and how to keep pace. Team members may need to upgrade their skills constantly. When you do this on a regular basis you will be able to determine if their poor performance is due to lack of skills or knowledge or if it is a behavioral problem.

One note in closing. I am not excluding the fact that you may have some employees that are simply not as good as you want them to be. I encourage you to find out what is really going on, communicate directly to them what your expectations are. Progressive leaders always take extra measures to prevent their employees from failing. After all, their success means your success!

Carole is President and Executive Coach of Progressive Leadership Inc who thrives on helping individuals and organizations discover and leverage their unique strengths. She also offers training and consulting in Knowledge Management and Leadership Development. Visit <http://www.progressiveleadership.com> for more info & subscribe to her FREE Ezine.

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