



Convey Disappointment with Grace

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Good economy, bad economy, health issues, home problems - it doesn't matter what the distraction is. Employees have two primary needs: 1) structure--knowing how effectively they are doing their job, and 2) significance—knowing where they belong; how their role matters.

Too often leaders focus on what they believe their people want rather than what they really need—structure and significance.

Here is a common dilemma presented by clients: “I’m disappointed in John. His attitude and productivity are slipping week by week. This affects layers of our workers who look up to him. I can’t bring myself to discuss this with him knowing the financial problems he’s facing. It would be another blow when he’s already down.”

John and his boss are focused on John’s financial problems rather than the big picture of what is required for John to excel. This is a lose/lose proposition.

The leader’s role is to see greater opportunities for the employee than what they see for themselves, not to get caught up in their struggles. Compassion is a fine attribute that can get in the way of leaders doing their job.

With John slipping, it’s time to have that difficult discussion leaders dread—conveying their disappointment.

Begin by adjusting your focus away from the outside challenges of your employee. Look at the larger picture and ask yourself: “What is the greater good for John?” The answer will be to reinstate his focus and confidence. This will also lead to the greater good for the organization.

How do you get John back to this place of heightened focus and confidence? Address his two basic needs of structure and significance.

Structure: John has most likely justified his descending attitude. This has been reinforced by friends and relatives who feel sorry for him. He has become a victim of the economy or whatever challenges distract him. This is not the John you knew six months ago.

Now it’s your job as his leader to convey your disappointment in order to help him succeed. Do this through letting him know how he’s doing with specific examples, giving him a *structure* on which to understand his slippage and how to improve. He needs this ‘success’ focus more than he knows.

Significance: When lost in self pity, anger or fear it is easy for an employee (or leader) to lose perspective of the importance of their role and the influence they have on those all around.

To complicate things, layoffs and downsizing mandate that companies change key employee roles often. An employee may now be supervising someone he’s worked side-by-side with for years. How does he know the intricacies of their new role to master it?

A winning game is to communicate precisely what each employee's role is, get him the tools to succeed and share how vital he is to the success of your organization.

For example, one client maps out each employee's role on a flow chart visible in their conference room. This instills pride. Each employee sees how he fits into the larger picture. Sales relies on production, who then relies on distribution, and down the line.

Conveying disappointment is inevitable when leading people. Avoiding this discussion will lead to larger problems. Using this theme of *structure* and *significance* creates a win/win game that becomes easier for you to execute each time.

I challenge you to stop procrastinating. Become a more effective leader by using these tools to have your tough 'disappointment' discussion sooner than later.

Read all of Ann's Writing and Wisdom at: <http://gvasuccess.com/writing-and-wisdom.htm>

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