

Practical Strategies Online!

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The email and Web newsletter
on organization and management issues

From Michael H. Smith, Ph.D. & Associates

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Five B's: Making Effective Agreements With Resistant Employees

Problem: Virtually every manager has experienced the problem of trying to make effective agreements with difficult or resistant employees. When feedback is given to them on how they need to change their behavior, they either ignore it or become even more difficult.

I've discovered that very often the problem in these cases is not solely caused by the employees. They often resist their manager's suggestions because they are too negative or too nebulous. In other words, the problem may really be that managers have never learned how to effectively communicate a performance issue with their people. So how can you give useful feedback to your people and make agreements work?

Solution: Here are some simple yet practical tips for making effective agreements with difficult employees:

Be positive – Tell them what you actually want them to do, rather than what you don't want them to do. For example, say, "You need to have the quarterly report in on time," instead of "Stop being late with the quarterly report." People may resist being told to stop doing something, but they may be willing to try something new.

Be calm - Don't get angry with them; that will only provoke their resistance. And name calling, such as labeling them lazy, sloppy or uncaring, is simply self fulfilling. So discuss the issue calmly with them.

Rehearse your comments in a private place, such as your car, until you are calm and focused.

Be specific – Be as specific as possible in your feedback so the other person can't say that they misunderstood you. Say "I need you to do these three specific things" and then list them.

Be persistent – Once a specific agreement has been made, set a date one week later to check on it. Observe them during the week and then ask, "How did you do?" at the meeting. Don't say, "How many times do I have to tell you?" Then keep checking until the goal has been achieved for two consecutive weeks.

Be supportive – When they've done a particular thing right, make a point of telling them about it. Encourage them to make that specific thing a part of their regular routine.

Example: I consulted with a company in the legal industry where a supervisor found that an employee was resisting his attempts to make her work habits more constructive. He strongly blamed her and had become angry with her.

Results: Once I taught him how to make effective agreements, he was able to communicate with her and her accuracy rate in document production increased 25% in three months.

Summary: Learn to give effective feedback. When you're calm, clear, positive, and specific with difficult employees, they'll be much more likely to do what you want when you want it.

New Contact Information

We've moved to a bigger space and more convenient location. Please note the new contact information below and please visit.

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