Giving Directions

Inquire: Sharing Work in a Group

Overview

How do you assign work when you are in charge of a group? Do you just let people volunteer? Do you assign them tasks at random? Knowing how to assign work can be difficult, but if you learn how, your group will be in a much better spot. This lesson will teach you how to set effective goals, how to communicate those goals to your team, how to motivate your group, and address problems you might face when giving directions.

Big Question: What is the best way to assign work in a group?

Watch: How to Give Directions

What do you think of when someone says “they are a great leader”? Do you think of a great boss you had? Maybe a mentor who impacted your life? Regardless of who you think of, this person probably has a valuable skill in giving directions. It sounds simple, but giving directions efficiently and accurately will greatly impact your ability to lead a group. In this lesson, we’re going to discuss some important aspects of giving directions to a team.

First, you’ll learn how to set effective goals. You need to focus your team’s eye on the prize if you expect greatness. To do this, you will identify the problem or task that needs to be accomplished. Then, you will set the overarching goal. After that, you will break the larger goal into smaller, more manageable pieces. Think of these as bite-sized goals.

Second, you’ll learn how to communicate goals and benchmarks. The team needs to know the plan and how they are going to follow through with the plan. To do this, you’ll learn that you have to be transparent. This means that you shouldn’t hide anything surrounding the goals you’ve set. Imagine how difficult it would be to work hard on something if you didn’t know the reason why you’re doing it.

Third, you’ll learn some ways to motivate team members. This is usually done with praise and encouragement; however, not everyone is motivated in the same way. When leading a team, especially in the workplace, it is necessary to ask your team members how they are best motivated. This might be through workplace parties or handwritten thank-you cards. However your team wants to be encouraged, it’s best to do it often. An upset team is an ineffective team.

Finally, you’ll learn some pitfalls of instruction-giving. No one is going to be a perfect leader or instruction-giver, but you can follow these tips to brush up on your skills. You’ll learn not to hover over your team while they are working and to always be willing to help. This lesson will help you become a
better leader, even if you’re not the boss. Giving instructions is something that everyone will eventually have to do, and this lesson will prepare you for that time.

Read: Telling Others What Needs to be Done

Overview

One of the scariest parts of working in a group is being in charge. This lesson will cover what it takes to set effective goals for your team, how to communicate goals and benchmarks you have set, how to motivate team members when they need it, and how to avoid some pitfalls when giving instructions.

How to Set Effective Goals

A **goal** is accomplishing part or all of a project, task, or assignment. Goals can be as simple as finishing an expense report by Friday or as complicated as using a multi-tiered system to accomplish a large project in incremental parts. Effective goal-setting is one of the most important things a leader can do. This section will outline the steps you need to take to maximize your group’s effectiveness.

First, identify the problem that needs to be taken care of. This is the only way to know what you need to do and figure out how to do it.

Second, set the overall goal and develop a clear statement of intent. Identify exactly what your team will have accomplished when the task is complete. A clear statement gives everyone guidance about what goal they are working toward overall.

Third, section it into smaller, more easily managed tasks. A large goal can be daunting. Segmenting the goal into smaller, bite-sized chunks that can be accomplished more quickly will help your team stay motivated as they work through their individual tasks.

Fourth, set timelines and follow through. It isn’t good enough to know what your team is supposed to do; they need to know when it should be done. Have a deadline for the overall goal and deadlines for the smaller tasks so that everyone knows when they need to finish their specific assignments. Without these timelines, you run the risk of delays when someone needs the work from another task that is not yet done. This kind of delay can affect the different moving parts of your overall goal. Hold the members of your team accountable. Once the plan is in place, it needs to change as few times as possible. Following through with the plan of action will help to ensure that everyone contributes to getting the goal accomplished.

How to Communicate Goals and Benchmarks

A **benchmark** is a point of reference. For team goals, a benchmark is the original plan you have created that people need to reference in order to make sure they are accomplishing everything they are supposed to. This section will provide you with several tips on how to make sure the benchmarks you set are clearly communicated to the members of your group in order to minimize confusion and miscommunications.

First, be transparent. Don’t hide how you came up with benchmarks. Certainly don’t hide what the benchmarks are. If someone in your group has questions, be open to telling them your decision process. Keeping things from members of your group only creates mistrust and makes it harder for members of the group to work together and with you.
Second, remind them frequently about what they need to do and when they need to have it done. You created benchmarks and a schedule for a reason. Reminders help people stay on top of the tasks you have given them.

Finally, use technology. Send reminder email messages. Create a shared calendar that has important dates listed. Technology has made it exceptionally easy to keep organized and stay on schedule.

**How to Motivate Team Members**

Motivating team members can be tricky. But, with just a few small things on your part, you can help motivate them to go above and beyond for the sake of the team. First, ask them how they are best motivated. Different people like different things. Some people want public praise, while others want a private compliment. Knowing how your team members want to be motivated can help you develop the best strategy to focus them on the team’s goal.

Second, offer frequent encouragement. Let them know you have noticed how hard they are working. Thank them for their dedication. Show them they are appreciated, and they will work even harder for you to accomplish the goals you have set out for them.

Third, answer questions promptly. When a team member needs help or clarification on something, be available. Don’t take a day or two to respond. That is time lost that could have otherwise been used productively in finishing their work. The longer you take to answer their questions, the longer they take to finish their work.

Fourth, help when asked. Not everyone will be able to do everything alone. Sometimes they will need help. Being open to helping, and even going above and beyond in the help you provide, will encourage your team to go above and beyond for you.

**Pitfalls of Instruction-Giving**

Everyone has been in a group with a leader that isn’t the best. When giving instructions, there are certain no-no’s that you can avoid in order to keep your team from thinking of you as that bad leader. First, don’t be overbearing. You’ve assigned them a task, so give them space to finish that task in the way they see fit. Their work process might be drastically different from yours, but as long as they do what they need to, leave them to their work. If you check on them too frequently, it can signal that you don’t trust them. That could make them less willing to give their best effort to the task.

Second, don’t be controlling. When someone does things differently than you, let them. Don’t try to change their work process. It will only cause them to accomplish the task more slowly. Everyone does things differently, so let them choose how to work as long as they are accomplishing the tasks you need them to.

Finally, don’t assign a task you aren’t willing to do yourself. There is always work that no one wants to do. But, if you are giving instructions, you need to be willing to buckle down and help finish tasks that others might have fallen behind on. This means that you shouldn’t assign people a task that you are unwilling to do yourself. If you won’t do it, then the task is seen as a punishment and makes that person less likely to be productive.
Reflect Poll: Your Listening Style

Which listening style do you find most helpful?

- People-oriented
- Action-oriented
- Content-oriented
- Time-oriented

Expand: Listening Styles

Overview

One of the most important things to keep in mind when giving directions is how people listen. Know how best to tailor your message to your team so that they take away what you intend from your instructions. This section will cover the four styles of listening and what messages will be most effective for them.

Four Styles of Listening

There are four listening styles: people-oriented, action-oriented, content-oriented, and time-oriented. A people-oriented style shows a concern for the emotions of others. A speaker should try to find areas of interest that are shared by the listener. A personal connection will help this kind of listener internalize information and connect with the message you are trying to send.

An action-oriented style requires short and accurate messages. Don’t include irrelevant information. Focus only on what you need them to do and when you need it done.

A content-oriented style evaluates the facts and details of a message before forming an opinion. This kind of listener will want you to explain your reasoning for decisions. So, when crafting your message, put extra consideration into explaining why you want or need them to do certain things.

A time-oriented style prefers quick interactions. Be as brief as possible when telling these listeners what needs to be done. They may tune out if you don’t.

Finding the listening style that works best for your team members can help you give instructions in a way that helps them the most. It is important to take into consideration that a team can have all four kinds of listeners present, so finding a message that can appeal to all four kinds is important. Convey the important information first so that the action-oriented people can get the message before they start to tune out. Keep the meeting short so the time-oriented folks don’t get stressed out. Have a rationale for any decisions, and explain your feelings about the task to appeal to the content- and people-oriented listeners of your group.

Lesson Toolbox

Additional Resources and Readings

An article providing an in-depth explanation of the four listening styles

- Link to resource: https://www.kingsleygrant.com/knowing-listening-styles-reduces-stress/
An article providing some methods on how to motivate people working in a group with you
  ● Link to resource: https://www.inc.com/peter-economy/9-super-effective-ways-to-motivate-your-team.html

An article providing tips on how to best set goals for your team
  ● Link to resource: https://www.mindtools.com/pages/article/newHTE_90.htm

Lesson Glossary

google: accomplishing part or all of a project, task, or assignment
benchmark: a point of reference to make sure the people in your group accomplish everything they are supposed to
people-oriented: a listening style that shows a concern for the emotions of others
action-oriented: a listening style that wants short and accurate messages
content-oriented: a listening style that evaluates facts and details of a message before forming an opinion
time-oriented: a listening style that prefers quick interactions

Check Your Knowledge

1. You should never share your decision making process with members of your team.
   a. True
   b. False

2. Encouragement is a great way to motivate members of your team.
   a. True
   b. False

3. Clear goals help a team work better.
   a. True
   b. False

Answer Key:

Citations

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