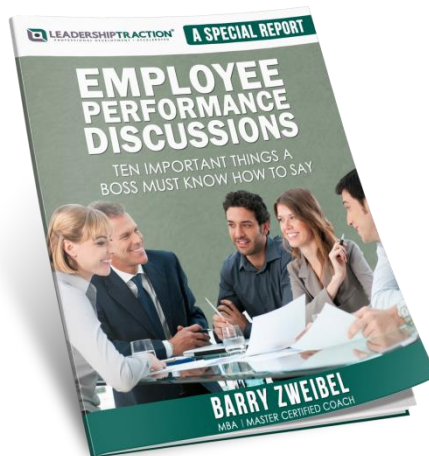

***A Special Report:
10 Important Things
a Boss MUST Know How to Say***



Barry Zweibel, MCC-Master Certified Coach
LeadershipTraction®

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Introduction

This Special Report on Leadership Development is based on the experiences of a highly successful manager, business executive and adjunct university instructor-turned-business coach and mentor. Upon review, you'll find that much of it could be considered simple common sense. Yet perhaps because of that, very few executives have seen the need – or taken the time – to share these or similar insights with their direct reports and leaders-of-tomorrow. (Or maybe far fewer executives than imagined ever learned these lessons in the first place.)

Regardless – or better said, as a result – this Special Report is a **must read** for anyone looking to improve the way they handle performance appraisal discussions and performance evaluations with their direct reports.

In what follows, you will find **10 specific conversation clarifiers** that can dramatically improve the performance of all employees - from your very best, to weakest, and everyone in between. It will detail **what to say, when to say it, and why**. It will give you **concrete examples** to follow. Even more importantly, it will help resolve one of the more chronic problems facing managers everywhere – not knowing how to communicate the requirements of a job in a way that **instructs, empowers, and holds fully accountable**, the incumbent.

As you read through this Special Report, you may recognize that you are already doing some of its recommendations. If you find this the case, congratulations! Know, though, that you can still use the contents of this report as an opportunity to dig deeper into how to interact even more effectively with your direct reports. The more you can embody the perspectives offered, the more powerful, respectful, and effective your communications can be.

If you're like most managers, though, many of these clarifying statements will dramatically shift your awareness of how you've been approaching your employee performance discussions to date. The biggest problem that managers have with employee performance discussions is that they don't have them soon enough. The second biggest problem is that when they do have them, they don't know how to control the conversations so that they work. Employee performance discussions are only *'more trouble than they're worth'* when you don't know what you're doing. This special report is designed to provide you with the precise language to demystify how to have these discussions sooner, rather than later. It also will help you keep the conversations that ensue on track and to point.

You will notice that each section includes four parts:

1. An **Explanation** of the particular *clarifier* – what it is and why it's important to say it in this specific manner

2. An **Application** section – a typical problem scenario will be provided along with a look at how using the *clarifier* can help clarify and simplify the situation;
3. A **Locking in the Learning** section – questions for you to specifically answer and assignments for you to actually complete to help you integrate the material more quickly and thoroughly into your existing skill-set; and
4. The **Primary Focus Question** – what you need to ask yourself to meaningfully apply each specific *clarifier*.

To truly maximize the value of this report, you must do more than just skim through it. Read through it at least three times. Read it a **first time** to get a general feel for the material. Read it a **second time** to compare and contrast your current thinking and the perspectives given. Read it a **third time** so you can lock in your learning of how to improve your handling of important employee performance discussions.

Use this report to create a customized learning plan for yourself. Take the opportunity to identify the top three *clarifiers* you'd like to master in the next 60-days. Create your own **self-study plan** and commit to following-through with it. Then pick another three and repeat the process.

Know, by the way, that you don't need to wait for someone to have a *severe* performance issue to put these lessons to practice. The best employee performance discussions occur *before* their performance gets too far out of hand. So the earlier you can spot potential problems – and address them – the better for everyone.

Also, know that it will take some practice and fine-tuning to make these recommendations work for you and the particular situations you face. But also know that if you DO put in the effort, the results can be quite productive and rewarding.

Choose consciously and purposefully what new skills you want to develop and you will find yourself becoming a much more influential – and successful – leader in your organization.

Here's to your continued leadership development,



Barry Zweibel
LeadershipTraction

Thing #1 – "This is EXACTLY the type of thing I want to see MORE of from you."

Explanation:

Sometimes it's not a matter of something being included or excluded; it's more a matter of something not being done enough. Let's say you're commenting on the way an employee handled a customer complaint. And let's say that the employee insisted he followed procedures. Upon review, you found that the employee DID, per procedure, ask good questions in researching the matter. You also found that that the employee DID, per procedure, follow up with the customer on a timely basis. But did the employee ask *enough* good questions to get to the crux of the matter? Did the employee *sufficiently assist* the customer when responding back?

It's important to acknowledge what was done right, but it's even more important to stipulate what else was required.

Application:

Sue, a budget analyst, does good work, but she often fails to independently take the next step to see things through to their logical conclusion. She's already been counseled about needing to do a more thorough job with her monthly Budget-to-Actual Variance Report. "Sue, when I say *more thorough*, I mean not just reporting that there *is* a variance, and not just reporting that the responsible line-manager *agrees* with the numbers, but also understanding what *caused* the variance, whether it's a *legitimate* reason, or not, and working with that manager to implement whatever *controls* are necessary to bring expenditures back in line. This is EXACTLY the type of thing I want to see MORE of from you."

Yet after submitting her very next Variance Report, Sue is unable to answer the most basic follow-up questions about several line-item variances. What can you say? This: "Sue, remember we talked about this as being exactly the type of thing I need to see *more* of from you? It's really a fundamental part of your job and there's no getting around it. So if I don't see a significant improvement in your analysis-work next month, we're going to have to have a different kind of conversation. Now, what do you need from me so that you can master this ongoing responsibility of yours?"

Maybe she needs to start her work sooner. Maybe she needs you to remind the line-managers to give her questions more of a priority. Maybe she needs a little more training. The point, though, is that once you make it absolutely clear what you're looking for from her – and talk

with her about what she needs to make that happen – you can start spending less time being frustrated by her poor performance and more time benefiting from her improved performance.

Locking in the Learning:

- Where are you not doing something as thoroughly as you might? What's your rationale for saying enough is enough? How might your employees be mirroring your behavior?
- Re-read each of your employee's job descriptions. Do they accurately reflect what you're looking for? If not, update them accordingly.
- Who in your organization isn't hitting the target enough of the time? On a clean sheet of paper, write down who you need to *see more* from. Next to each name, write down what *more* you are looking for from that person. Then, one at a time, meet with each person on your list and tell them what it is that you need to see more of. Let them know that "this is exactly the type of thing I want to see more of from you."
- Identify some specific – and meaningful – assignments that would allow your employees to demonstrate their abilities to work something all the way through. Challenge them to be as thorough as they can within the given timeframes and review their results directly with them.

Don't limit yourself to thinking only about employees with significant performance problems. Try putting it into practice with an employee whose performance is not in crisis, but who nevertheless could benefit from some specific constructive feedback on your part.

Primary Focus Question:

Who in your shop would truly benefit from hearing from you say, ***"This is EXACTLY the type of thing I want to see MORE of from you"***?

Thing #2 – "Here's what you MISSED."

Explanation:

Often times, it's not so much what an employee *did* that was wrong as much as what he or she *didn't* think to do in the first place. While these Errors of Omission usually don't cause any harm, per se, they are clear examples of why many individuals don't perform as well as they might – they don't know how to recognize or leverage the opportunities available to them because they don't see them *as* opportunities to provide more value than they otherwise could.

So when an employee says, "Whadeya mean? I followed the procedures!" it's *essential* that you get them to recognize these Errors of Omission so you don't have to detail every single step a person should take every single time you assign a new project. You'd much rather be confident in knowing that they can fill in the blanks themselves, right? But this means it is all-the-more important for you to help them see what's missing in a constructive manner so they can catch the real learning from what did, or did not, happen.

Application:

Scott is a customer service rep for an internet service provider. His job is to handle complaints that come in via the telephone in such a way that the caller feels that his/her problem is resolved in a timely and professional manner. It's been a long week for Scott and it's pretty clear from the tapes ("This phone call may be recorded for training purposes") that he's thinking more about the upcoming weekend than the caller on the line. Did he appropriately address the caller's problem? Yes, he did. But in reviewing the documentation, it becomes clear that the customer has been billed improperly for the service in question. Did the caller specifically ask about the billing? No. So even though Scott noticed the billing problem, he chose to ignore it. This was an Error of Omission.

"Whadeya mean? I followed the procedures!" he said when asked about it.

"Yes, you *did* follow the procedures," you might reply. "But here's what you missed – you missed the opportunity to (a) Wow! our customer with your thoroughness AND (b) prevent another customer complaint before it even happened. It's not unrealistic to think that at some point, Scott, this customer is going to realize there's an error and he'll call back mad-as-a-hornet about it. You know what those kinds of calls are like – they're brutal. You had the chance to *prevent* one and chose not to. That's pretty inconsiderate of you, actually. So I want you to understand that I'm looking for you to take a little more initiative when you find problems like these. And I want you to let me know when you do so I know you've taken this discussion to heart. Any questions about this?"

Oftentimes employees do not realize that taking another step is even allowed. Their Errors of Omission are often more a result of not wanting to rock the boat than of not taking their responsibilities seriously. So it's *your* responsibility to make sure they understand what is – and is not – appropriate with respect to doing those little extras. There's nothing worse than when employees *think* they're doing a good job, but actually aren't ... except, perhaps, when they're thinking they're not allowed to do what's in the customers' best interests because no one gave them permission to do what they know to be right.

Locking in the Learning:

- Make a point of reviewing your employees' work, not just to see if what they did was correct, but to also consider what they might have missed.
- Consider Errors of Omission you might have made. What kept you from squaring the corners? Was it that you didn't realize something at the time, or were you just being inattentive?
- Encourage group discussions with your employees about what it means to provide a customer with your Undivided Attention. Work with your staff to identify, and meaningfully address, what might be preventing them from more easily doing so on a more regular basis.
- Have them share with you examples of where THEY were the beneficiaries of this type of value-added service in their interactions as a customer to some other company.
- Make a point of rewarding (or at least recognizing) employees who do that something extra. Create a mechanism where they can share the Errors of Omission that they DIDN'T make.

Don't limit yourself to thinking only about employees with significant performance problems. Try putting it into practice with an employee whose performance is not in crisis, but who nevertheless could benefit from some specific constructive feedback on your part.

Primary Focus Question:

Who in your shop would truly benefit from hearing from you say, ***"Here's what you MISSED"***?

Thing #3 – "It's your job to make SURE you understand what's needed here...ESPECIALLY when you don't."

Explanation:

When communicating with your staff, it's your responsibility to make sure that the messages received are, in fact, the messages you intended to be received. Let's repeat that for emphasis - it's your responsibility to make sure that the messages received by your staff are, in fact, the messages you intended for them to receive. (Of course this doesn't excuse poor communications on *your* part, but you want your employees to know that if they aren't clear on something, it's incumbent upon them to ask you for clarification.)

Given the hectic pace of today's working world, conflicting priorities, poor listening skills, and any of a variety of other reasons, there will always be times when messages are misunderstood, forgotten, or thought to be irrelevant - even though everything seems fine from the feedback you receive. It's unavoidable.

That's why it's essential that employees know that it's *their* responsibility to understand what's needed – especially if they don't.

Stating this up front makes it very clear that "I didn't understand what you meant" or "That's what you said" are not valid excuses for poor performance.

Yes, it's your job, as boss, to communicate as effectively as you can, but you also want to make sure that your employees know that it's *their* responsibility to make sure they properly understand what it is you're *trying* to communicate to them. Enabling effective communication is a two-way street.

Application:

There's a big meeting coming up where you need to represent your department on a key (and somewhat complex) issue in front of higher-ups who ask tough questions and want straight answers. In order to properly prepare, you need help from two of your direct reports. That is right, you've got another one of those '*drop everything you're doing and come help me*' kind of requests. And this one is REALLY important.

So you sit down with Robert and Maria and tell them exactly what you need. Well, you tell them *almost* exactly what you need. The problem is that what you need will depend on what

they find through their analysis. It's a time-sensitive AND complicated request, but one that needs to be addressed, nevertheless:

"I need you two to really think this through for me because I don't have the time to do it with you. Now in the past, you both have had some trouble with these types of requests and ran into trouble because you weren't sure what I wanted you to do and I wasn't around to ask. But you two are the best-suited to handle this new request and I'm confident that you can do a great job with it.

"Let me make it perfectly clear, though, that it's your job to make sure you understand what's needed here – *especially* if you don't. So, let's spend a few moments now talking through what's needed. Then, I want the two of you to keep going and think through what *else* you may need to know, or do, so I can answer any questions you may have. Is that clear? Okay, good. What, if anything, can I clarify for you at this point?"

Approaching the issue this way will certainly reduce the number of misunderstanding, misinterpretations, and Missed Moments to talk about what really needs to be talked about. Clarity is a key goal in any communication.

Locking in the Learning:

- Who in your organization tends to not think things through to the next level?
- What do they not seem to understand about what to do next?
- What permission are you prepared to give them so that they know they can ask the questions they need to? How do you want to handle questions you're not prepared to answer?
- How can you make your request clearer so that there is less ambiguity on the front-end?
- How will you validate that they truly understand what it is that they need to know?

Don't limit yourself to thinking only about employees with significant performance problems. Try putting it into practice with an employee whose performance is not in crisis, but who nevertheless could benefit from some specific constructive feedback on your part.

Primary Focus Question:

Who in your shop would truly benefit from hearing from you say, ***"It's your job to make SURE you understand what's needed here...ESPECIALLY when you don't"***?

Thing #4 – "If you do not actively INCREASE your value-added, it will quickly dissipate."

Explanation:

Some jobs are more about doing the same thing 1,000 times than doing 1,000 things one time each. And because of that, some employees believe that they have no responsibility to manage their ongoing growth and development. But they are wrong.

Consider the situation where you have a very important – and challenging – new assignment to deliver. Are you going to feel comfortable relying on someone who's just *putting in their time*? Or would you rather give it to someone who's eager – and able – to do an outstanding job with it? And, when review time comes around, which employee is more likely to get the larger raise/bonus?

That's why when doing developmental plans, I recommend focusing on five specific elements - two that you, as the boss, choose for the employee, two that you and the employee choose together, and one more that the employee chooses for him- or herself. Make it known that their continued growth and development is a requirement, and they'll go beyond optimization.

Application:

Danielle knew her job. And each day she came to work and did it without much of a fuss or bother. Her boss was grateful that she needed so little supervision, but he wished he could rely on her for more challenging assignments.

"I do my job. I do what you ask. It's not my fault you don't ask more from me," she replied, somewhat defensively, when he raised the matter with her. "What more do you want from me?" As awkward as that moment was, they now could have an important conversation that would help Danielle recognize and address this developmental need/opportunity to take responsibility for increasing the value she provides to the organization.

"Don't get me wrong, you do fine work, Danielle," her boss began. "The thing is, though, that you don't seem to be *growing* your skills in a meaningful way. And what we need here in the organization are people who are willing to work on increasing their *value-added*. So, if you want to receive better performance ratings, you need to know that if you do not actively *increase* your value-added, it will quickly dissipate.

“Now this may be a new idea to you, so let’s start working on it together. Then you can continue to build on it from there.

“So what I want to do is identify **five specific ways** that you can increase your value-added, moving forward. I’ll start by naming two ways, we’ll then both identify two more, and then I want you to come up with one more yourself, okay?

“First, I want you to take the next two days to consider the prior assignments you handled. Ask yourself what *else* you could have done to increase the value of your work. Then, come back and we’ll discuss each assignment in this new context. Any questions so far?

“Second, Identify five people you know who regularly provide significant value-added in what they do. These can be people in your workgroup or department, from some other department within the company, a vendor contact – even a customer if you think that makes sense. What I want you to do is talk with them to find out about their *philosophy* about providing value. Ask them for examples of the ‘extra’ that they do. Look for patterns, habits, and techniques that are part of their Growth and Development Strategy that aren’t part of yours. Make sense?

“Now, let’s come up with two more ways that you can improve the value of your work...

“And now you give me one more way you could increase your value-added ...”

Locking in the Learning:

- Consider the impact that your *own* performance is having on the organization. Where is it strong? Where is it lacking? What skills would be helpful for you to learn/improve? What are three things you could do in the next month to develop them? Who can help? Who might be a good role model for *you* to learn from?
- For each of your direct reports, think through what *would* improve their impact and value. Where is their performance lacking? What skills would be helpful for them to learn/improve? What are three things *they* could do in the next month to help them develop more on their own?

Don’t limit yourself to thinking only about employees with significant performance problems. Try putting it into practice with an employee whose performance is not in crisis, but who nevertheless could benefit from some specific constructive feedback on your part.

Primary Focus Question:

Who in your shop would truly benefit from hearing you say, ***“If you do not actively INCREASE your value-added, it will quickly dissipate”***?

Thing #5 – "Your performance is affecting more than just YOU."

Explanation:

Something that frustrates many managers is how difficult it can be to put a chronically-difficult employee on a performance review program. There's no '*one thing*' you can point to – it's more a body of work (or lack of it) that's at issue.

Claiming an employee is under-performing, although problematic, is rarely considered grounds for termination. (Grounds for more training, yes; grounds for better supervision, yes; but grounds for termination? Usually not.) The '*answer*' then is to show how the employee's substandard performance is affecting much more than just the successful completion of his or her *own* work. Be respectful and even-tempered but perfectly clear; articulate the broader implications. Maybe the person's poor performance has *significantly contributed to* a drop in overall workgroup quality or productivity, thus increasing the cost of doing business. Maybe it's created the need to address co-worker morale problems. Maybe it's resulted in additional – and otherwise completely avoidable – customer complaints. Looking at the broader implications helps solidify that it's not just an individual's performance issue, but a performance issue that's affecting the *organization's* ability to do its work.

Application:

Melissa was a purchasing agent who took cost control very seriously. As a result, the company often benefited from her making sure that everything was exactly right in the orders she placed, the records she kept, and the processes she developed. But if a vendor made even the smallest math error when processing an invoice, she'd refuse to do anymore business with that company. And if a line manager requested an expedited shipment, she'd refuse to process it on the grounds that the manager needed to learn to submit his/her paperwork in a timelier manner.

She was very difficult to work with, but whenever people complained, she contended that she was doing her job to keep costs down. "Math errors and poor planning," she said, "cost this company *real* dollars."

But the reality of the situation was that her practices were actually *increasing* company costs – important orders were being delayed, less capable fulfillment vendors were being used, and critical schedules were being compromised while waiting for un-expedited shipments, as example.

“While you’re doing a great job taking your work seriously, Melissa, you need to know that your performance is affecting more than just you,” her boss ultimately said. “Here are three examples:

1. By firing that vendor because they made an inadvertent math error on an invoice – which they made good on, by the way – the line department was forced to work overtime to finish some of the vendor’s outstanding work.
2. When you refused to expedite that order for those key components, we were unable to meet our delivery commitment to some of *our* customers.
3. When you routinely reject purchase orders you receive because of simple errors, you slow down the entire organization’s ability to do their jobs.

“So it’s really important that you understand that your performance is affecting more than just you, Melissa. Now this doesn’t mean that you should just let anything go. But it does mean that you need to consider the circumstance and if someone makes a mistake filling out the form, you can call them to get clarification instead of just holding it and waiting for them to call. And if a vendor makes an honest billing error and is willing to correct it, you don’t have to fire them the very first time it happens. And if someone can justify why an expedited order is business-appropriate, then it *is* business-appropriate. You need to start thinking about cost control on a broader scale.”

Locking in the Learning:

- How does the work of each of your direct reports affect each other?
- Whose performance are you *putting up with*?
- What hidden costs are incurred when that person fails to properly do his/her job?
- How do you monitor the broader context of the work of your staff?

Don’t limit yourself to thinking only about employees with significant performance problems. Try putting it into practice with an employee whose performance is not in crisis, but who nevertheless could benefit from some specific constructive feedback on your part.

Primary Focus Question:

Who in your shop would truly benefit from hearing you say, ***"Your performance is affecting more than just YOU"***?

Thing #6 – "It's your responsibility to update me SOONER."

Explanation:

No one likes surprises, especially last-minute, crisis-laden ones. After all, who doesn't dread the words, "I *probably* should have told you this earlier, but ..."? Now not all last-minute crises can be avoided, but almost every employee monitors a specific set of indicators to see how things are going with their job, even if they do so only informally. They do this because they know, even if it's just intuitively, that by keeping track of what's *really* important, they can minimize the probability of crises happening in the first place and maximize their ability to handle them smoothly and efficiently when they DO occur.

As example, customer service reps may informally monitor how productive other reps are *really* being when calling queues start to back up. They may see patterns in the *types* of complaints that come in at different times of the day/days of the week. They may notice inconsistencies across customer history files.

An order processor, as example, may look at the trend of expedited requests or computer system responsiveness during key processing intervals. A technician may rely on *other* system stats because they are more predictive in nature.

The point is that employees routinely '*plug into*' all sorts of off-line indicators, or Flash Stats, and typically understand how things are *really* going in very meaningful ways. If you can get them to share these insights with you, things are likely to run much more smoothly.

Application:

So if the key is to get employees to start sharing these Flash Stats with you, what's the best way to make that happen? By asking them to provide you with something called Unsolicited Updates.

Here's what you say to your staff: "It is your job to keep me abreast of things going on in your area. It is your job to tell me these things without me having to ask. You know me well enough to know the kinds of questions I am likely to ask, so what I want you to do is give me the answers to those questions BEFORE I ask them.

"Let's call these communications Unsolicited Updates so we have a way to refer to them. And I want you to give me Unsolicited Updates daily, to start. They don't have to be long and drawn out – the quicker the better, in fact. But make them as timely as possible.

“Don't worry if the news is good or bad. It's far more important that the news is NEW. That way I can know what's going on sooner rather than later, and we can spend far more of our 1-on-1 time together working on things that matter more to YOU, rather than running around fighting fires. By the way, I promise not to shoot the messenger and you can hold me to that commitment.”

The power of Unsolicited Updates is that they can give you glimpses of problems before they even become problems. And that's a really good thing.

Locking in the Learning:

- What Flash Stats do you currently monitor? How meaningful are they?
- What Flash Stats do you *want* to monitor? Who can help you with that?
- What Flash Stats do your employees monitor *informally*? Why? What does just knowing about them help you understand about what's *really* important?
- How can you utilize this idea of Unsolicited Updates in your own organization?
- What specific questions do you ask people to address when giving you an Unsolicited Update?
- How can you monitor whether you're already *shooting the messenger*?
- How can you show your appreciation to employees who bring you bad news before anyone else?
- Share with your employees several examples of how Unsolicited Updates and other news *scoops* actually benefited the organization in whole or in part. How can you encourage people to provide even more of them?

Don't limit yourself to thinking only about employees with significant performance problems. Try putting it into practice with an employee whose performance is not in crisis, but who nevertheless could benefit from some specific constructive feedback on your part.

Primary Focus Question:

Who in your shop would truly benefit from hearing you say, ***"It's your responsibility to update me SOONER"***?

Thing #7 – "Yes, it's about effort, but it's also about RESULTS."

Explanation:

In business, effort is important. But effort in and of itself is insufficient. The goal, after all, is not just to try. It's to succeed. So kudos to the employee who's demonstrating a sincere effort to make things better, but help them understand that there's a desired outcome to be achieved, as well.

Application:

Michael was a fabulous human being, but only an average performer – and that's giving him the benefit of the doubt. He just couldn't seem to get things done by time they were due. It wasn't for lack of trying, though. It seemed that he was *constantly* trying. Yet, no matter how hard he worked, deadlines would come and go without much more than a rough draft of what was needed.

"I'm trying as hard as I can, boss," he'd say, "but things come up and I have to deal with them first because you'd be all over me if I didn't." It never helped that he had a way of getting you to commiserate with him about how crazy it gets when it gets crazy. He really was quite personable, the kind of guy you wanted to succeed more than he actually did.

But enough was enough.

"Michael, yes, it's about effort, but it's really about results. And if you can't make the results happen, then you're not doing your job. Don't get me wrong – I appreciate how hard you try, it's just that *trying* isn't enough. A dissatisfied customer doesn't care that you *tried* to help if you end up not helping.

"The Big Boss doesn't care that you *tried* to complete your report on time if she still doesn't have it by time she needs to present its findings to the Board.

"And your coworkers don't care that you *tried* if they end up being in crisis mode because you couldn't get your work to them when you said you would.

"It's great that you try – it really is – but it seems like your *trying* is more focused on *doing* the work, rather than *finishing* the work. And you need to *finish* the work on a much more timely basis. So, let's have a conversation on exactly how you make these results happen.

“First, let’s use the white board to make a list of what’s getting in your way. Good. Any others you want to include? Let’s make a point of getting them all out in the open without judgment. Good.

“Now, which ones are the most troublesome for you? Which ones occur most frequently? Which ones do you think you can handle yourself? Which ones do you need some help from me on? What do you want me to do to help? Good.”

Notice that the questions being asked and the resulting conversation are geared toward creating a strategy for dealing directly with whatever is at issue. It’s not just conversation for conversation’s sake, it’s conversation for the sake of helping Michael get clear on what really IS at issue so that he can deal with it once and for all.

Locking in the Learning:

- What are *your* views about the importance of effort versus results? Are you a win-at-all-costs type of manager, an as-long-as-you’re-trying kind of boss, or a believer of something in between? How do you decide when enough is enough, or when too many corners are cut?
- What keeps *you* from finishing things you start?
- What do you tell yourself that perpetuates this pattern of behavior?
- What do you know you need to do to get beyond it?
- What structures and accountabilities would help you in that regard?

As with so many things, the better we understand our own default behaviors – and take purposeful steps to modify them – the more effective we can be in helping others work through them as well.

This is not to say that what works for you will work for everyone, but it is to say that there is no substitute for having a grounded awareness of what it’s like to break old counterproductive habits and replace them with new, better-serving, ones. It helps you be more relevant, caring, focused, and direct.

Don’t limit yourself to thinking only about employees with significant performance problems. Try putting it into practice with an employee whose performance is not in crisis, but who nevertheless could benefit from some specific constructive feedback on your part.

Primary Focus Question:

Who in your shop would truly benefit from hearing you say, ***“Yes, it’s about effort, but it’s also about RESULTS”***?

Thing #8 – "Here's ANOTHER example of what I've been talking to you about."

Explanation:

Nothing ices an employee faster than a clearly negative, but substantively vague comment from the boss about his or her performance – especially at review time. So if you've got some bad news to give, you need to both put it in as broad of a context as you can to maximize your flexibility in how you respond to what may happen next AND provide at least **three separate – and specific – examples** of the issue you're addressing, so it becomes obvious that these are not isolated events, but part of a larger pattern of poor performance. That way, even if the employee can explain away one or two of them you can still point to a third AND make the larger point that there seems to be an awful lot of 'close calls' – certainly more than would be reasonably expected if there were no performance concerns to begin with.

Application:

Mary has a performance problem. She was often late getting in to work and coming back from breaks and lunches on time. You've talked with her about each of them, but she always had a pretty good reason to offer. And, more importantly, nothing seemed to change. So the next time she was late coming in, you *'turned up the heat'* and told her in no uncertain terms, "You need to get here on time."

Over the course of the next two weeks, Mary arrived each morning on time, if not early. And, according to Mary – and probably Human Resources – the episode was over.

However, during that same period, Mary called in sick once, left early once, took extended lunches twice, and started disappearing a lot during the day. But because you narrowly defined her performance issue as 'not coming in on time,' these OTHER infractions were seen by Mary – and Human Resources – as unrelated to 'not coming in on time.' If you wanted to address these NEW issues, you would have to start the performance discussion process all over again.

You could see the writing on the wall – you were getting terribly frustrated, Mary was seemingly *playing* the system, and you just knew that if this scenario repeated itself a few more times, she'd start complaining to HR that you were targeting her. And guess what ... HR would probably think that Mary was right!

How's *that* for a show of support?! NOT.

That's why it's so important to frame the performance issue, from the onset, as broad and deep as you can. So rather than limiting it to a morning tardiness issue, broaden it like this: "To DO your job, Mary, you have to BE here. And if you can't be here, you can't stay here."

And then go deep: "Let me give you some specific examples of what I'm talking about: (1) you were late coming in last Monday, Wednesday, and Thursday; (2) you were late coming back from lunches on Wednesday and today, (3) you left early yesterday; and (4) you're often nowhere to be found during each day. NONE of this is acceptable: Your job requires you to be here when you're supposed to be here."

Now let's say she improves, but you've started to notice her still '*disappearing*' each morning between 10:30 and 11:15. "Remember me telling that you can't stay here if you can't BE here, Mary? Well, while I've noticed you coming in on time lately – and thank you for that – here's another example of what I've been talking to you about ..."

Broadening and deepening the context like this gives you far more authority (and leverage) to effectively manage an employee's ongoing performance. Ultimately, it is Mary's decision whether to bring her performance up to the required standards, or not. If she chooses not to, though, you will have already put in place a very clean mechanism to address the problem without excessive hand-wringing, or delay, on your part. Be sure, of course, to keep a log of each transgression so you can share them with Mary, your boss, and Human Resources.

Locking in the Learning:

- Think about a recent employee performance discussion that didn't go all that well. How might you have broadened and deepened the conversation to control it more effectively? What seemingly unrelated infractions might you have combined and discussed as a larger performance *theme*?
- Think about an employee performance issue you're currently facing, or getting ready to face. How can you broaden and deepen *that* conversation to? What seemingly unrelated infractions might you combine and discuss as a larger performance *theme*?
- Who's been chronically under-performing in your shop? List out as many transgressions as you can. Consider them in total to see what performance themes emerge?

Don't limit yourself to thinking only about employees with significant performance problems. Try putting it into practice with an employee whose performance is not in crisis, but who nevertheless could benefit from some specific constructive feedback on your part.

Primary Focus Question:

Who in your shop would truly benefit from hearing you say, "***Here's ANOTHER example of what I've been talking to you about***"?

Thing #9 – "You failed to honor not just one, but TWO commitments you made to me."

Explanation:

Think of it this way: Every time an employee agrees to do something, he or she is making a commitment to complete the assignment on time, within budget and to scope. But sometimes an employee will decide that your deadline is not as important *to them* as it is to you. Or for some legitimate reason, they can't follow-through. You know what it looks like. You assign someone a task, hear nothing, and then check to find that '*something came up.*' As if *that* makes it alright!

Well sometimes it might be alright, but generally speaking, you probably asked for the work to be completed so that it *would* get completed, right? And to add insult to injury, *you* had to be the one to ask, only to find out it *wasn't* completed.

This scenario is quite common – and equally frustrating. But with a little practice, it's actually quite easy to avoid. The key is in reframing your initial request so that it results in you receiving *two* commitments for every single item you delegate. The first commitment is the agreement that the person will, in fact, complete the work, on time, within budget, and to scope. The *second* commitment is getting the person to agree to let you know *as soon as possible* if, for whatever reason, s/he suspects that s/he will not be able to honor commitment #1. This *second* commitment gives you incredible leverage should the work go undone.

Application:

Jon has just given Marty an assignment and is making sure that Marty understands what is needed to be done by when. "Got it boss," said Marty as he turns to leave.

"Oh, one more thing," Jon continued before Marty could slip away. "I want you to know that although it may not seem like it, this is, in fact, a very important, time-sensitive, assignment. So thank you for agreeing to complete it on time. But, if for some reason you cannot finish it on time, will you be sure to let me know that ahead of time so I can make other arrangements? Good, then I have *two* commitments from you – one that says you'll get the job done on time, and another that says that if for any reason you can't, you'll be sure to let me know as soon as possible so that I won't get hit with any last-minute surprises. Thank you, Marty."

Now chances are good that with an assignment framed this way, Marty's going to give Jon what he needs when he needs it. But assume the deadline comes and goes without a word from him.

"Marty," begins Jon. "You missed your deadline for the assignment I gave you. Not only that, but you didn't let me know that you wouldn't be able to complete it on time. That means you failed to honor not just one, but TWO commitments you made to me. And that's a problem. You see I need to know that I can count on you and your commitments, Marty. If I can't, there's really not much point in having you work here, is there? Now tell me about what happened and how you intend to deal with it ..."

Now let me ask you, how many times do you think Marty needs to be on the other end of a conversation like that before he wishes it never happens again? So, chances are pretty good that, from here on out, he'll make a point of: (a) trying his best to actually get his assignments done on time; or (b) being sure to let you know *ahead of time* if he can't. And should he let you know ahead of time, be sure to thank him for following through on that *second* commitment.

But let's say that the next time Marty fails again to honor "not just one, but TWO commitments." What then? Well, the conversation can simply go like this:

"Marty, we've talked about the importance of you honoring the commitments you make. As I said before, I need to be able to count on you to do as you say you will. Unfortunately you have shown me just the opposite. So since this really is an important performance requirement, this conversation (and memo to you) is formal notification of the problem we're facing. Do I have your commitment that you'll start honoring *all* of your commitments here at work? Good. And if for *any* reason you can't, will you let me know that ahead of time? Excellent! I now have two commitments from you on this. Thank you."

Locking in the Learning:

- What commitments aren't being honored by you or your staff?
- What's the impact of not being considered trustworthy by your peers, staff, boss, vendor contacts, customers, etc.?
- How does talking about commitments help clarify the importance of improved communications at work?
- In what other conversations can you apply the leverage of TWO commitments?

Don't limit yourself to thinking only about employees with significant performance problems. Try putting it into practice with an employee whose performance is not in crisis, but who nevertheless could benefit from some specific constructive feedback on your part.

Primary Focus Question:

Who in your shop would truly benefit from hearing you say, ***"You failed to honor not just one, but TWO commitments you made to me"***?

Thing #10 – "You need to SUSTAIN the improvements we've been talking about."

Explanation:

When it comes to performance improvements, it's not just about change – it's about *sustaining* change. So help your employees understand that you're interested in more than just flashes of brilliance from them. Make it very clear that the ultimate litmus is the employee's ability to maintain their changed behavior.

Noticeable consistency is particularly important here as some employees tend to act one way in front of the boss and another way when they think the boss isn't looking. So if coworkers cannot comment on an individual's improvements, chances are pretty good that those changes may not be as permanent as the employee would have you believe. (Note, this is not asking coworkers to 'snitch' on each other. To the contrary, it's asking them to share 'good' stories about them with you.)

Application:

George was pretty good at his job. He was friendly, fun to be around, had a pretty good grasp of his responsibilities, and generally demonstrated a professional persona in front of his boss. But when the boss was not directly involved in the interactions, George was quite a tyrant. Many of his coworkers, staff, and vendor contacts felt he could be verbally abusive, inappropriately vindictive, and otherwise untrustworthy. Yet by and large, George had a very loyal following. And in front of his boss, he was particularly well-mannered, so the problem was masked for quite a while.

Over time, though, snippets of his unprofessional behavior found their way to his boss. So she sat down with him for a conversation. George's initial response was to feign disbelief, so the boss let it go. But the pattern of his inappropriate behavior persisted so the boss met with him again, this time:

"George," the boss began, "I need to speak with you about a recurring – and very disturbing – trend. It seems that notwithstanding our prior conversations, you're continuing to be verbally abusive with people, and this just cannot continue. The last time you said it was not even an issue, yet here we are again. I need you to demonstrate to me that you can deal with people in a far more professional manner from here on out. And I want you to know that you need to *sustain* the improvements we've been talking about."

A few weeks passed and George seemed to be doing better. He really seemed to be making a sincere effort to treat people more respectfully. But then a rash of complaints started filtering in again.

“George,” the boss began, “For a while, I noticed – and heard about – a significant improvement in the way you were speaking to people. Thank you for taking our conversation to heart. But recently, it seems that you’re sliding back into old habits again. So while it’s great that you were able to temporarily *improve* your behavior, you have not shown me that you can *sustain* those improvements. And you need to *sustain* the improvements we’ve been talking about, as well.

“What you ultimately do about this is *entirely* your choice, but know this: your unprofessional behavior cannot – and will not – be ignored. If you choose NOT to make the necessary changes, or fail to sustain them from this point forward, you will not be able to work here. You will lose your job. Do you understand?”

George said he *did* understand, but again, after a few weeks of improved performance, he started backsliding again. Notwithstanding the boss’s final warning, George could not sustain the improvement. As such, he was given the choice whether to resign or be terminated.

He chose to resign.

Locking in the Learning:

- Who might be acting unprofessionally when *you’re* not looking?
- What documentation do you need to prepare so that, if you need to terminate someone for unprofessional behavior, you have what you need to satisfy your boss and Human Resources?
- How much time is *reasonable* to allow an employee to address his or her problems?
- How much time is *unreasonable* to let an employee’s behavior go unchecked?
- What additional flexibility does this notion of *sustaining the change* provide to you in dealing with some longstanding employee performance problems?

Don’t limit yourself to thinking only about employees with significant performance problems. Try putting it into practice with an employee whose performance is not in crisis, but who nevertheless could benefit from some specific constructive feedback on your part.

Primary Focus Question:

Who in your shop would truly benefit from hearing you say, ***“You need to SUSTAIN the improvements we’ve been talking about”***?

Conclusion

Maybe in the past you were forced to put up with certain aspects of employee performance because you didn't have the tools to handle them properly. Well now that you've read through this Special Report, you should have a much better handle on what to do, how to do it, and why.

Remember, too, if you DON'T address employee performance problems in a timely and appropriate manner, your inaction will negatively affect the performance of the entire workgroup. And as we learned from Clarifier #10, that's justification for your boss to have a serious employee performance discussion with YOU!

Kind of ironic, don't you think?!

So don't let that happen. Be a role model for the people you work with. Show them that they can do a better job by doing a better job yourself. Accept the challenge to be as good as you can be – better than you maybe currently are – by learning the lessons contained in this report.

As stated in the introduction, to truly maximize the value of this report, you must do more than just skim through it. You need to read through it at least three times. Congratulations for completing Read One. You now have a general feel for the material. Don't forget to read it a **second time**, though, so you can compare and contrast your current thinking to the perspectives given – and a **third time** so you can *lock in your learning* of how to improve your handling of important employee performance discussions.

Remember, too, that commitment you made at the beginning of this report to develop your own customized learning plan. It's now time to choose which '*clarifiers*' you'll be focusing on first. Which ones would you like to start using within the next 10 business days? Which ones do you want to become more natural by the end of the month?

It's truly fascinating to consider how much of our success is simply determined by what we choose to do next ... or what we *don't* choose to do next. (Note that this is different from choosing what *not* to do.) Choosing wisely and purposefully not only makes good sense, it makes good success.

Here's to your continued success.

Who in your shop would truly BENEFIT from hearing you say ...

1. "This is EXACTLY the type of thing I want to see MORE of from you."
2. "Here's what you MISSED."
3. "It's your job to make SURE you understand what's needed here...ESPECIALLY when you don't."
4. "If you do not actively INCREASE your value-added, it will quickly dissipate."
5. "Your performance is affecting more than just YOU."
6. "It's your responsibility to update me SOONER."
7. "Yes, it's about effort, but it's *also* about RESULTS."
8. "Here's ANOTHER example of what I've been talking to you about."
9. "You failed to honor not just one, but TWO commitments you made to me."
10. "You need to SUSTAIN the improvements we've been talking about."

About Barry Zweibel



Barry Zweibel ("zwy-BELL") has been professionally coaching and mentoring executives, directors, managers, entrepreneurs, and teams to accelerate their business savvy and leadership traction – that is, their ability to get the right things on time, to scope and within budget; successfully work with and through other people; and take full responsibility for their impact.

Some of Barry's clients have included AT&T, aNet, Solutions, Chicago Mercantile Exchange, Citi, Farmers Insurance, Hill-Rom, Jenner & Block, Monsanto, Nationwide Insurance, Sunbelt Services, and TIAA.

Before his coaching career, Barry proved to be a resilient, focused and highly effective leader in the intense world of mission-critical technology operations, having served for many years as vice president and corporate officer in the financial services/telecommunications sector.

Barry earned his MBA from DePaul University and a BA (psychology) from Case Western Reserve University and was an adjunct instructor at Northwestern University.

He earned his CPCC (Certified Professional Co-active Coach) from The Coaches Training Institute, is a graduate of Team Coaching International, is certified by The Center for Conflict Dynamics as a master trainer, and, since 2007, has been recognized by The International Coach Federation as a Master Certified Coach – a distinction that fewer than 2% of all coaches, worldwide, have achieved.

Barry's insights on leadership, coaching, mentoring, conflict management and career acceleration have been widely published, in both online and print media.

The Wall Street Journal, *CNN.com* and others have quoted him as a subject matter expert. He is also a highly-regarded speaker and panelist and author of **Leadership Haiku: Increasing Your Impact and Influence, 17 Syllables at a Time**.

He welcomes the opportunity to discuss – or speak about – the leadership development ideas presented in this Special Report.

"Barry has helped me become a better executive and leader; and I have seen improvements in all the relationships in my life. I have also seen other people he's coached overcome their challenges and blocks to growth. Promotion after promotion for them (and me) can be traced back to working with Barry. Anyone who has a chance to learn from him will be grateful. I highly recommend his services."

- JS, Vice President

LeadershipTraction's Mission, Vision, and Values

LeadershipTraction's MISSION:

LeadershipTraction was founded in 2011, as a division of GottaGettaCoach!, Inc. (which I founded on July 4, 2000 - Independence Day!) for the purposes of accelerating the professional development of seasoned executives, mid-level managers, and newer and aspiring leaders – because even the smartest, most capable, people get stuck or frustrated, at times.

LeadershipTraction's VISION:

LeadershipTraction helps executives, managers-of-managers, and high-potential/emerging leaders achieve 3-5 years of personal and professional growth in a fraction of the time by helping them refocus their confidence, competence, and drive, so that they can move meaningfully forward with more energy and enthusiasm and purpose.

LeadershipTraction's VALUES:

- Adhere to the highest of ethical standards at all times
- Have a bias toward making a meaningful difference
- Coach as powerfully, and masterfully, as possible
- Challenge, support, respect, and regard; seek, learn, grow, share

About the LeadershipTraction's Logo:



Look at the image from above (as if you were looking down at it from atop a building) and you can see two people, arms up at shoulder height, pushing against each other - not angrily, but in an energizing, engaging, and supportive way.

The single big dot in the middle represents those two people (coach and client; teacher and student; mentor and mentee; etc.) "putting their heads together" – literally and figuratively – in a collaborative, unified, way in service of their professional development.

As with progressive resistance training, where the "push back" is increased as your muscles gain strength and endurance – and akin to "iron sharpens iron," but without all the loud hammering and sparks flying every which way – LeadershipTraction, and Barry Zweibel's style, in particular, is relevant, engaging, resonant, and extremely helpful.

For more information, visit: www.ldrtr.com or call 847-291-9735 to speak to Barry, directly.