the stepping stone

Dear Stepping Stone: The GROW Model for Coaching

by John West Hadley

Dear Stepping Stone:

I am currently a manager with only one direct report. There are many professional people and clients with whom I interact either via phone or in person on a daily basis, and I have in the past managed as many as 40 direct reports.

I expect professionals to act accordingly, and when that is not happening I clearly let them know. I don't yell or scream; I just tell them what I found and what needs to happen next, which sometimes comes across as arrogant or cold. This has been a common theme over the years, that people's first impression of me at work ranges from arrogant to condescending to cold. I've been told that once people get to know me, this perception goes away. If I could alleviate this from the beginning it would save a great deal of time by creating immediate trust.

Working in healthcare means that mistakes can be life-threatening or affect licensure. Trying to lessen the blow takes time, often time that I don't have. I've found myself stuttering when I have a question or when I need to make staff aware of a mistake that they've made.

Can you give me a catchphrase of sorts to start my sentences so as not to put staff on the defensive when I need to talk to them about mistakes?

Sincerely,

Want to Improve First Impressions

Dear *Want to Improve:*

What you are really talking about is coaching.

One key is that you need to be really invested in improving long-term performance vs. solving the immediate issue. The more you tell someone what you found and what needs to happen next, the less they learn from it and the more likely it will be that they fall into similar mistakes in the future.

A general model is "**GROW**."

G = Goals. Mutually agree on the goals of the discussion right at the outset.

R = Reality. Ask effective questions that get to what

happened. Get really curious about the situation, and try not to insert your own reality into it or challenge the other party. For example, asking *"Why did you do it this way?"* will put the employee on the defensive. *"What factors led you to approach it this way?"* is more likely to encourage the employee to think about the issue and their approach more deeply and often will cause them to see errors in their approach without your ever needing to point them out.

O = Options. Explore various ways to approach or to have approached the issue, attempting to elicit them from the employee rather than pushing your own on them. Try not to throw in your own thoughts as possible options, or criticize or challenge theirs, unless specifically asked. Keep asking questions, like "That's interesting … what other ways might we also consider?" This gets them to broaden their thinking, and to do more of their own analysis. You may even be surprised to find viable options that you hadn't thought of.

W = What Will You Do? This is where you get agreement on steps the employee will take to solve the problem. It is important that these are as specific as possible, and that the employee clearly buys into doing them and trying things that way.

You may be thinking at this point, "I don't have time to do all this."

Of course you need to consider in which cases you can afford the time to coach someone versus simply directing them. However, this really doesn't have to take a lot of time in most situations. And since this helps develop the employee so that fewer problems arise going forward, plus helps them more rapidly expand their thinking and capability, it's an investment in productivity.

Dave Miller (www.BusinessGrowthNow.com) and I did a workshop on coaching techniques, using the GROW model, at an SOA meeting. We had participants partner up to role play coaching situations. Several commented on how they actually got value from just five minutes of coaching from an untrained stranger! Think about how much progress you could make working with someone you know, and with more than five minutes at a shot!

If you want an easy primer on this, read *Coaching for Performance* by John Whitmore.

Finally, to your question about catchphrases, in the short run you could simply try asking more questions instead of telling. Try to avoid questions that start with "Why?" which tend to be challenging and negative. You could start the discussion along the lines of *"It seems like something happened that created X, and I'd like to work with you to make sure we can avoid this in the future. Does that seem reasonable?"* ●