



Coach's Corner:

Are you spending too much time getting employee buy-in?

Do you ever wonder if you're spending too much time getting your employees to buy in to your way of doing things? How hard should you work for buy-in? And what should you do if you don't get it? Find out in this issue of *Coach's Corner*.

The Dilemma

My client Derrick looked weary as he described a problem with his employee Katie. "Her department is missing important deadlines and she refuses to consider any solutions other than adding staff," Derrick said. He went on to recount his latest conversation with Katie:

Derrick: Katie, we need to talk about the deadline issue.

Katie: Again? You know our department is understaffed, Derrick. We're doing the best we can.

Derrick: Yes, I know you're down by two FTEs. And, we've got approval to replace them next year. In the meantime, we have to do a better job with the headcount we have. Apart from the staffing levels, what might be contributing to our missing deadlines?

Katie: It's all down to staffing.

Derrick: Come on, Katie. Work with me here. How about doing a root-cause analysis to see what else may be driving the problem.

Katie: A root-cause analysis will just confirm what I already know: we're missing deadlines because we are short-staffed. The answer here is for you to go to the president and ask her to let us add staff *now*. We need you to advocate for us, Derrick.

Derrick looked at me and shook his head. "The thing is," he said, "I'd be happy to advocate for more staff - if I knew that staffing was the only driver of our problem. But, I don't know that, which is why I need Katie to do a root-cause analysis. I'd hoped she'd buy in to the idea, but we've had this conversation several times and I'm not making any headway. I wonder if it's time to pull rank."

"What's the downside of spending more time trying to bring her around?" I asked.

Derrick looked concerned. "We'll start to miss customer delivery dates," he replied, "which tells me that Katie needs to start that root-cause analysis right away. How do I tell her that without making her angry?"

"You can't control Katie's emotions," I replied. "That's Katie's job. Your job is to announce your decision in a way that is as easy as possible for her to hear." At that point, Derrick and I discussed how to do that. We identified five strategies he could use with Katie:

- Clearly communicate his decision and the rationale for it
- Explicitly state his expectations
- Empathize with Katie's disappointment
- Express his appreciation for her cooperation
- Offer his support

Another conversation

With these strategies in mind, Derrick had another conversation with Katie. Here's how that conversation went. The strategies Derrick used appear in brackets.

Derrick: Katie, I want to revisit the deadline issue. We need to take action before this starts affecting customer deliveries [rationale], so I want you to do a root-cause analysis of the deadline problem [decision]. Let's map out the entire process from sale to delivery, then pull all the process participants together to get their thoughts on what's driving this. Can you do that by the 20th [expectations]?

Katie: I really don't think that's a productive use of our time, Derrick.

Derrick: I know you don't. And I can imagine that this must be a frustrating assignment for you [empathy]. I really appreciate your taking it on, given how you feel [appreciation].

Katie: You're really going to make us do this?

Derrick: I am [decision]. Does the 20th work as a deadline?

Katie: I'd feel better if we had until the 25th.

Derrick: That's fine. What help can I provide on this [support]?

Katie: I think I have what I need.

Derrick: Thank you, Katie. I appreciate your cooperation [appreciation].

Summary

It makes sense to pursue buy-in; things go more smoothly when you and your employee agree on the right path forward. That said, when delay is more costly than proceeding without buy-in, it's time to act. When you do decide to act, accept that you can't control your employee's response. Focus instead on being clear, empathetic, and supportive.