



Things Don't Get Done Right Unless You're Involved? Here's How to Break the Cycle.

## Description

You may have heard the phrase "If you want something done right, you have to do it yourself." Hopefully, as a leader, you don't find yourself saying this very often.

I've had leaders tell me that employees don't really complete assignments. They will get an assignment to a certain point but then don't really take it "across the finish line." The leader ends up feeling like they have to step in and finish the project or that in order for it to be done right, they have to be involved.

When this happens over and over, it can be frustrating and counterproductive. Spending time on tasks employees should be doing greatly increases your workload. You end up not having time for the strategic thinking and planning you need to do as a leader. Plus, it dilutes the opportunity for an employee to feel the satisfaction and fulfillment that comes from successfully completing a project. Now, your impulse might be to think "The employees need to do a better job." But we often find that when we work on ourselves first, we influence others on our team. "Fixing" the behavior of others always starts with us.

So how can you shift your own approach in a way that ends up improving the performance of employees? You can start by asking yourself these questions:

- **Is my instinct to do the work for them instead of sending it back for them to fix?** It's easy to see why this happens. We are often promoted because of our ability to solve problems, so our first impulse is to jump right in. Also, we may gravitate toward this work because it's familiar and comfortable for us. The unintended consequence is that we create employees that take projects halfway. We are training them to do this! Remember, what we permit, we promote.

- **Am I teaching critical thinking or practicing Park Ranger Leadership?** What I call Park Ranger Leadership is the attitude that leaders will swoop in and rescue employees if they get "lost in the wilderness." We help people so much that they quit helping themselves. To reverse this, when employees bring you a problem, ask them what they think they should do. Getting them to solve their own problems often creates better outcomes (as they are likely closest to the problem) and it is also good professional development to help them reach their potential.

- **How am I really spending my time?** Am I doing the most important things? Here is an exercise that may help. Begin by creating these three columns:

A. Things Only I Should Do

B. Things Others Could Do While I Delegate

C. Things I Should Never Be Involved With (Because My Team Is Competent)

Zero in on each item in the B and C columns and take steps to shift them to others. This transition

won't happen overnight. Assign a person to take over these tasks and a date by which it should happen.

Not only will this exercise help you see where you have opportunities to improve, it can help you stay focused on the most important things. It forces you to pay attention to what's happening.

• **If people aren't complying, is it a will or a skill issue?** If it's a skill issue (and this is often the case) ask yourself "Do we do enough skill building around tasks?" It's tempting to think you don't have time to train, but remember that not having time is often a symptom of not doing something that needed to be done earlier. When we don't train, issues that require leaders will multiply exponentially.

• **Was there clarity around expectations?** Were we clear on responsibilities, deadlines, outcomes, and so forth? Do they know what "right" looks like? If you think you may have an issue here, a good test is to have people repeat back to you what they think expectations are after you assign a project.

• **Does the employee have the time to truly do the job well?** You may need to evaluate their workload. For example, have people been given additional responsibilities over time that you may not be factoring in?

• **Do we have good Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) on how things should be done?** This will eliminate a lot of ambiguity around how things should be done. If you don't have good SOPs have employees create them. They are closest to the work, after all.

• **Have we created a culture of rentership vs. one of ownership?** Often people behave like renters because they don't truly understand the big picture and how their role fits in. By narrating this (rather than just giving them the "slice" that directly pertains to them) you'll help them think like owners.

• **Did I connect back to the *why* and to our organizational values?** Often, reminding people why you're asking them to do something makes buy-in far more likely.

• **Do I reward and recognize people who complete tasks fully and on time?** Recognized behavior gets repeated.

As you implement new practices, narrate to employees that you'll be doing things differently (knowing what to expect is important) and also *why*. When we change our behavior even in positive ways, it creates anxiety. You might say "I've held up the mirror and I see that some of the things I'm doing may be holding you back. You are an incredibly smart team of folks and I need your help to come up with better solutions."

Be careful in times of major stress or turmoil. Stress will kick you back to old habits. Do a self-check periodically to make sure you're still on course.

Above all, be kind to yourself. Most leaders "help" our employees more than is beneficial. It is really because we care so much. Again, know that change won't happen overnight. The important thing is to keep moving in the right direction and allow enough time for new behaviors to stick before adding more. Slow and steady usually wins the race.

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