



Correct, Don't Break: Improving Your Skills

By Bill Kinnard

Why can't they just do what you asked them to? It's not that hard. You spent the time thinking through the processes you want them to use. Every time they pull up to a customer's home, they will park on the street, be prepared, know the customer's name, use it within the first 30 seconds of the conversation, wear shoe covers, etc., etc., etc. They just don't seem to get it. You asked them to do something – they work for you - they should just do it! Right? You have sat down with them a few times now and asked them to change but they still don't seem to get it. Can they be fixed?

Course Corrections Are a Part of the Job

As the leader of your company, you need

to define the culture in your company. If your vision of what your company culture should look like differs from what it is, you will have some corrections to make in your team members. Correcting others is a critical skill that leaders need to develop. There are occasions where you need to be objective and non-emotional during difficult discussions. It's even harder to address performance issues or disciplinary matters.

A person who has not yet developed skills in correcting others could either tend to be too insensitive or harsh in correcting others. If you find yourself doing this, you likely also notice that you tend to view your employees or direct reports as simply "units of work." How they feel is irrelevant. On the other hand, you

could be too sensitive and not willing to provide the constructive criticism or positive discipline required to develop and employee. If this is you, chances are you place too much emphasis on empathy and may be so sensitive to the feelings of others and put their emotions over the needs of correcting a problem. Either way, it's a problem.

On the other hand, a person who has developed his capacity in correcting others can usually provide constructive criticism to others in such a way that it is not received as insulting or degrading. The balance he exhibits in weighing the needs of the situation versus the needs of the people involved allows him to address both adequately.

This Is the Real Deal

Good skills in correcting others are directly related to your skills in other related areas. For example, if you have not established Key Results Areas or Key Performance Indicators for your employees, they have no clear job performance goals and therefore you have no good framework for discussing performance issues. Similarly, if you are not a motivator for your troops every day – a positive role model and coach – you will be much less successful at managing the same people during difficult times that require conflict management or disciplinary action.

Correcting others is not just about the “here and now” of a difficult situation. You can only be skilled at correcting others – and your corrections will be accepted by your employees – if you have their respect and trust at other times.

What Are the Skills Associated with Correcting Others?

Someone who has mastered the skills associates with correcting others:

- Remains calm and in control in an emotionally charged environment.

- Does not verbally or non-verbally confront others when the environment is different, demanding or emotional.
- Is able to resolve an issue and move past it unemotionally.
- Has the ability to confront controversial or difficult people or issues in an objective manner.
- Is able to identify alternative solutions and select the best option in the face of conflict.
- Is aware of, but not slave to, the feeling of disputing parties
- Can divorce personal allegiances and come to the best solution for all concerned.
- Is receptive to hearing both sides and all facts before jumping to any conclusions.

Managing employees can be a challenge. You need to be able to lead them, guide them and discipline them when necessary. At the same time, you don't want to end up running an adult daycare. You know what I'm talking about. Joe can't get along with Ben so you can't have them working together on a job. Lisa is having problems with her boyfriend and drags it into work every other day. It's during these times that you wish you are still a one man shop. At least then you didn't have to deal with this “Relational Garbage”. At the same time, your employees can make your company what it is. They can help you create a culture that they all want to be a part of but you have to lead the way.

Listening Skills

Active listening is a key element in order to correct others objectively. I teach a program called “Providing Great Customer Service...In the Trenches” where I go through an exercise with the class on listening. I play one audio clip at the standard speaking rate, and a different clip at the standard listening rate. I

ask the class to tell me specific information about each message. I have a bunch of service techs giving me specific information about a wine tasting event from a message that they just listened to at a rate of 350 words per minute. They do it with remarkable ease. The question I have is that if people speak at a rate of approximately 150 words per minute and they listen at a rate of 350 words per minute, what are they doing for the remaining 200 words per minute?

When involved in a difficult situation, many times you are preparing your rebuttal or thinking about your own viewpoint instead of what the other person is saying. Resist this urge. Focus on what the person is saying without immediately becoming defensive or judgmental.

Remember – You’re All Involved

When dealing with employees who are in disagreement with others on your team, keep in mind that your goal is to help others work through difficult situations themselves in a calm and dignified manner. Help those involved define the problem issues. If tensions get high, suggest that you meet at a later time when everyone has “cooled off” a little. When you do get down to discussing the issue, have them search for a common goal on which they agree and define that goal clearly so both know what the outcome of the conversation is.

Handle conflict as an opportunity for collaborative resolution. If all parties are involved in the resolution, they will all have a vested interest in carrying it out – they all have buy-in. Don’t try to WIN the argument. Try to see each disagreement as an opportunity to attain mutual satisfaction – even if it is in a slightly different way than what you had imagined. Unless the issue you are dealing with is in regard to a performance issue, remember to focus on that common goal and try to design an outcome that includes some things you want and some things the other person wants. If the issue is a disagreement between multiple people, make sure all parties

are heard and ultimately get that buy-in from everyone involved.

Disciplinary Actions

The first thing to have in place when dealing with disciplinary actions of your team members is having Key Results Areas, or KRAs. What does success in this job look like? Every employee on your team should have their KRAs and they need to understand that this is what you expect from them. If they are not hitting their KRAs, they are falling short of your expectations. If your team members don’t know what you expect from them, they don’t know if they are missing the mark. Develop KRAs for each position in your company. From here, handling disciplinary actions become much easier. Think of yourself as a mentor or coach to your employees.

Here are a few points to keep in mind when dealing with a disciplinary issue:

Timeliness – Give regular feedback to your employees and team members. If you wait until the end of the year to do an annual performance evaluation, know that you are really missing the mark. If I did something wrong a year ago, and you are just now getting around to talking to me about it, you have allowed me to only further entrench that bad habit into my routine. What did that cost you? Give daily, positive feedback to employees and team members. Be specific and personal in your praise. This allows you to have the credibility to address problem areas when then arise. When they do, address issues immediately. Express criticisms in terms of specific job requirements and required behaviors.

Never Attack the Person – The problem is not the person, it’s the behavior. If the problem is the person, they need to be invited to work somewhere else. If it’s the behavior, look at performance issues as an opportunity to discuss job functions and make cooperative, beneficial improvements.

Make Recommendations for

Corrective Action – Once you have allowed the employee to explain their perspective, discuss the job functions. Make recommendations for corrective action based on the discussion. Maybe you will find that the process needs to be modified. Both parties can suggest improvements to the process. If an improvement plan for the employee is needed, it is important to allow the employee to take part in developing the plan. They are more likely to implement the correction action if they were involved in creating it in the first place.

Action Steps – Once attainable action steps are determined, assign each of these steps to a person. Be sure to put each step in writing and assign a completion date. Having the “who,” “what” and “when” in writing is important to correcting the performance issue. Everyone will know what is expected of them. Lastly,

follow up on the action steps once they have been completed.

Correct the problem traits of your employees in a way that won't break their spirit. Part of this means you have to possess or develop the skills required to do this. You also need to know the communication strengths and weaknesses of your employees.

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