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How to Set Standards for Excellence

You can provide piles of documented requirements, policies, and quotas along with spoken expectations for excellence. Yet the standards — the reality of the level of acceptance of anything less — are what some, if not most of your employees and colleagues will live by, and even in some cases, strive for.

If you want to set standards for excellence, **you and your team must define and agree on what excellence is, and then consistently expect it, and accept no substitutes.** To some, this may seem inflexible, or worse, dictatorial. On the contrary, if an individual or a team isn't buying into a standard, and you're aware of their discontent, I encourage you as their leader to solicit their ideas for setting new standards. And then as always, listen, consider and respond.

Consider the following examples — A director of sales makes it clear as she hires new salespeople, that they are required to hit 100% of quota by month four on the job. However, in their fifth and sixth month two newer reps are hovering between 85% and 90% of quota. The director decides to let it ride for a while because she likes being able to depend on applying the 85% to 90% to the team goal for the quarter.

The director of sales is now setting a standard for the entire team that says: 85% to 90% of quota is acceptable. Left alone this standard falls short of excellence. One positive option is for

the director of sales to consider changing the expectation curve for new salespeople, redefining what excellence is.

A vice president is consistently disappointed in his director's ability to be well prepared. Recently, the director was asked to write the first draft of a project plan and present it to the VP in a meeting before involving the rest of the team to fine-tune strategies. Once again, when the VP first realized that the individual was not prepared, he seriously expressed his disappointment. The VP then continued with the meeting where he and the director came up with the draft of the plan.

If the VP was serious about setting a standard for excellence as it relates to preparation, he would have rescheduled the meeting on the spot. The standard for preparation would become clear — Being well prepared is crucial. Being unprepared is unacceptable.

I hope this helps you in setting or resetting standards for excellence.

Do you have a specific question relating to an accountability challenge you're experiencing currently? Email me and I'll reply to you on the next business day, with a complimentary response.