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## FIRM MANAGEMENT

# It's Not You, It's Me: Tips for Effective Team Communication

The next time you are frustrated that a task you assigned wasn't done on time or correctly and your first response is to blame the the staff member, realize it is time to change your approach.

Garrett Wagner • Sep. 11, 2023



Imagine this scenario: You're explaining a complex multi-state tax return project to a co-worker. A mere thirty seconds in, you notice their concentration waning they seem to be elsewhere mentally, opting to sketch on their notepad rather than engage.

You walk away thinking you have explained the situation perfectly but can't shake the feeling that they didn't understand you. Too often they either say they didn't understand what you are saying or just never started the task you explained.

You feel more frustrated by this than ever before, thinking why can't they get it right! Unfortunately, it isn't about them getting it right. You need to assign the task correctly for them to get it right.

## **1. Recognizing the Pre-existing Knowledge Base**

The first step is simple, yet crucial and where most people fail. Evaluate knowledge levels of the other person. Consider the implications of delegating an intricate multi-state tax return to a newcomer without adequate training. It's akin to asking someone to sail across a bay without them knowing how to sail.

A startling statistic from Go2HR suggests that 40% of employees with inadequate training opt to leave their jobs within the first year. This highlights the pitfalls of workplace assumptions and their potential implications for retention.

For the finer points: Does the new recruit even know where the coffee machine is located? Assumptions, especially in a professional setting, can be hazardous. Your interactions with others are not based on your knowledge level but need to be adjusted based on the knowledge level of others.

## **2. Measuring Motivation Levels**

The next phase is determining motivation. It's evident in every workplace: Some employees tackle tasks with unwavering enthusiasm, while others display a more reserved demeanor. Identifying this divergence isn't merely insightful—it's imperative for strategic training. According to a study by Dale Carnegie, companies boasting engaged employees outshine their counterparts by a staggering 202%.

Former U.S. President Dwight D. Eisenhower encapsulated it well when he said, "Motivation is the art of getting people to do what you want them to do because they want to do it." Applying this understanding facilitates smoother navigation through even the most labyrinthine tasks.

The key take away is that once you understand someone else's motivation level, you can adjust your approach. You will notice below you only need to identify if they have a low or high motivation need, this isn't on a complex sliding scale.

## Adapting to Individual Needs

Once you can identify where others sit at both the knowledge level and motivation level it is time to figure out how to adapt your approach based on where the people you interact with actually are.

Different team members possess diverse strengths and requirements and different approaches that provide great success. You may be surprised to understand that most people when they assign a task assume that others are high knowledge and high motivation, why, simple it is how we want them to be.

- **High Knowledge, Low Motivation:** These are the experienced individuals who, though they possess vast knowledge, might require a catalyst to invigorate their commitment.
  - Key takeaway: Follow up with them on the assignment to make sure they stay on track and help support their low motivation.
- **Low Knowledge, High Motivation:** These members, though possibly lacking in experience, have enthusiasm in abundance. They merely need direction.
  - Key takeaway: Focus on providing them the required training and knowledge they need. If you are in a senior role, you may want to have someone else inside the organization provide the training if you don't have the time. After all if you are struggling with assigning tasks to other and are reading this article you are problem in this bucket.
- **High Knowledge, High Motivation:** The experts who have both knowledge and drive. The strategy here is clear: Allow them to take the lead.
  - Key takeaway: This one is easy, sit back and relax and don't stir the pot.
- **Low Knowledge, Low Motivation:** These individuals require extensive guidance, consistent encouragement, and affirmation of their potential.
  - Key takeaway: This is the hardest situation and is often the new staff hire that needs both technical training and support on them completing the task. You need to accept that this person needs more work and effort from you to complete the task.

## The Road to Effective Training

A LinkedIn survey has shown that an overwhelming 94% of employees would prolong their tenure at an organization if it invested in their professional growth. This underlines the significance of understanding and adapting to individual learning preferences and motivational triggers. Effective training isn't merely a checklist—it's an art or shall we say a science based on two metrics.

In essence, training is an intricate ballet between the mentor and the mentee. It isn't about inundating participants with slides or jargon-heavy manuals. It revolves around forging meaningful connections, discerning the unique needs of your audience, and engendering an environment conducive to progressive learning.

Every topic, whether it's the nuanced realms of state tax returns or office protocols, mandates an individualized approach. This involves careful observation, active listening, and adaptability.

The next time you are frustrated that a task you assigned wasn't done on time or correctly and your first response is to blame the the staff member, realize it is time to change your approach. Accept that you may need to adjust your approach based on where the other person is at. Trust me the results will surprise you in a good way.

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*As CEO, cofounder and a consultant with [C3 Evolution Group](#), Garrett Wagner, CPA.CITP, works with firms across the country helping them to implement lasting change by understanding the unique needs of each organization.*

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