

Say No to Getting “Yessed” to Death 3.11.13

One of our key employees yess's us to death. She tells us what she thinks we want to hear. I don't know how to get across to her that we need to know what's going on – good and bad – so she – and we – can deal with it.

Thoughts of the Day: Make sure you're emphasizing the right things. Set up a process for identifying and solving problems. Log and prioritize issues. Reward employees who seek to improve.

It can be scary to admit that something's gone wrong or that one is in over his/her head. It's natural to avoid risk. How you lead your employees will speak volumes about your company's ability to make progress on big and little issues – now and in the future.

When things go wrong, how do you react? Do you get upset? Or, do you put on a game face and embrace opportunities to make the organization better?

It takes time to change. People have to be able to step back and look at what's going on. If they're already overbooked, an interruption is a burden that leads to more overtime, less productivity, and more blaming when work doesn't go out on time. Who wants to deal with that? Better to ignore the problem, hope it goes away. Instead, set up an environment where change can happen.

Look at workload. If employees don't have some free time during the day to work on improvements, if they're always behind, fix it. Look at how work flows through that area. Reorganize tasks and get additional staff. It may seem like it costs more, but until you make time to deal with problems at the root, they just keep costing you time, money and energy.

Even with extra time in the day, it's impossible to deal with everything at once. Set up a log where everyone can record things that need to be worked on. Schedule work sessions to review the log. Assign people to work on items and review outcomes. Report company-wide about improvements that are being made.

Teach employees to consistently approach problem solving. Step 1: identify the problem. Step 2: Define the problem. Step 3. Make a list of all possible causes. Step 4. Decide who else to involve in the problem solving process. Step 5. Brainstorm possible solutions. Step 6. Try out solutions. Step 7. Evaluate results. Step 8. Assess outcomes. Step 9. Make adjustments. Step 10. Write it up for future reference.

Teach employees how to look for root causes. Talk about the importance of investigating why something went wrong, rather than fixing the surface. Make sure

employees understand that permanently getting rid of problems requires tracing things back to their source of origin.

Sound like a lot? So is overlooking things that need fixing. A systematic approach to problem solving will lead to better outcomes and more permanent solutions. And long term, that means less stress, higher productivity and bottom line savings.

Make it clear that as problems come up, they are to be solved, not ignored. Make that a core value of the company. Teach employees that they contribute the most when they look to build better outcomes.

Look at what happens when employees come forward with issues. Are they promoted or penalized? Are they recognized for being outspoken, or shoved to the side as always complaining or challenging the status quo? Build a better organization by recognizing employees who identify problems and solutions over those who promote the values of being in control and covering up.

Loss of status, credibility or opportunity for promotion may go along with admitting a person can't handle a situation. Make sure this doesn't happen in your company. Make people hero's and winners because they continuously look for ways to improve what's going on. Talk with your yes-ing employee about how her life gets better when she eliminates stress by working with openly with team members and management to make things work better.

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