



A best practice report For Managers, Principals, Team Leaders
and Internal Consultants
Author: Henry Blatman- Leadership and Performance Coach

Issue No 6: To get what you want start with you...

Sent to subscribers periodically throughout the year.
Please pass on **be your best** to people in your network.

To change your email address, give feedback or be removed
from this list please reply to this email address.

Word count for this issue: 1241 words
Approximate time to read: 6 minutes

To get what you want start with you...

The Background

My client, a managing director of a company, rang me to arrange a meeting. He wanted to discuss how to conduct performance reviews for his staff as this was new territory for him. I agreed to come the following week wondering what had sparked his sudden interest in performance appraisals.

Almost as soon as I sat down Paul proceeded to tell me about Robert who is one of his key managers. The first minutes of the conversation were a download about Robert's poor management style, his inability to motivate his team to get work done and some of the negative views that other team members had expressed about Robert.

I started to inquire into what was really going on: I asked Paul if he had spoken to Robert about any of the issues or concerns that had been raised about him. Paul's response was to say that he didn't want to put pressure on Robert because he thought that Robert would then 'tear strips' off his team and that they would lose motivation. Paul explained that in the past Robert had taken a very confrontational approach in dealing with his team members and this had led to many problems in the team. It had also meant more work for Paul as Robert's team members would end up taking their complaints to Paul.

I was interested in pursuing the issue of accountability so I asked Paul if there was a position description for Robert.

"Oh there is," said Paul, "However, it was written a while ago and it's not what we want him to do."

“I think we should just let Robert go and make some other arrangements,” added Paul, “But it would be a pity because he knows so much about our business.”

I want to push Paul more as I thought there was more to it. I have actually known Robert professionally for sometime and one of the things I do know about him is that he is a very good Requiring manager (he tells and seeks excellence). He has professionalised the systems and processes used in the business as well as taking responsibility and successfully implementing several projects. Robert is not as good, however, at Relating skills (e.g. consulting and listening).

“Why haven’t you sat down with Robert and discussed his job description and what you expect of him as a manager?” I asked. Silence filled the room.

What’s happening

I said to Paul “its sounds like what you are doing is wanting to change the people rather than change the people.”

Robert had been there for several years and Paul had not spoken to him about his or his team’s performance in a way that had led to any meaningful changes. His conversations with Robert were usually directive and pushed all the responsibility onto Robert. I suggested to Paul that Robert probably did not feel very supported in his role and now the solution is to let him go.

In his book, ‘The 2R Manager*’, Friedes says that many managers have a constant underlying fear that if they challenge a person they will leave and the manager will then have more problems. So they therefore sacrifice a short term ‘sting’ for long term pain thus creating a big rod for their own back. Paul has difficulty going beyond this fear and stepping back and thinking about what is best for the company.

Paul needs to take the mantle as a manager and have a conversation that would help Robert recognise some of the difficulties with his management style that they could then work together to resolve.

This is easy to say but it requires understanding of how you behave as a manager, what you model and how this impacts your own people. You may be blind-sided to some of your own weak points. People don’t come into organizations with a clean slate they have their own values and behaviors. This doesn’t make Robert’s behaviour right but he is not to know that if he is not challenged in an open and supportive way.

A common phenomena in organizations is to see the problem outside of yourself (this is called projection). In this case, I suggest that in seeing some of Robert’s performance issues, Paul is at some level confronted with his own issues in managing Robert. Rather than ‘own’ his own lack of skills or willingness to do something to help the situation, Paul “projects” his own feelings of inadequacy onto Robert by pointing out how ‘bad’ Robert is. This means Paul does not have to look at his own part in this problem and therefore face his own limitations as a manager. In my observation of successful managers, this willingness to look at your own limitations is key to ensuring you get results in the modern workplace.

What Robert needs is a manager to support him, challenge him, talk to him and believe in him. A manager who has the courage to accept his own limitations and grow as he helps Robert grow. A manager who is as much a learner as the people he is managing. He does not need a manager who screams at him or avoids sitting with him and working through

some of the hard issues.

I said to Paul that it was now decision time. He cannot move forward unless he is willing to commit to Robert and his role in the company or let him go.

When I explained this to Paul the penny started to drop, "I guess it means me spending more time with Robert," said Paul.

His words filled the room with his simple yet profound understanding. A silence fell between us and I knew that he had recognised the need for him to take responsibility in managing Robert in a more positive and effective way - a way that could make a huge difference to both Robert, his business and ultimately himself. He realized that if it were going to be different it would have to start with him. He confirmed that yes, he did want Robert on board.

Friedes says that "... a manager must take power back in her relationship by saying what she needs and discussing with her staff member how she will support him to get the desired results."

It may not work out for Paul and Robert in the long term, however Paul will have tried to make a difference and, importantly, would have sent a clear signal to other staff that he is a responsible manager. More importantly, he has taken his power back. The focus is no longer on Robert and his team, the focus has changed to 'what Paul can do to work with the team to improve the situation and their business'. After all - and it's just a slight change in emphasis but a powerful one - the only thing that Paul can control is his own behaviour and the example he personally sets.

We finished the meeting with an action plan and Paul was positive that things were going to change.

Main takeaways

- Sometimes managers will change the people rather than 'change' the people
- Blaming can often be an excuse for a manager not taking responsibility for their own role in a situation.
- The only thing a manager can control is his/her own behaviour and the example he/she sets.
- You have to start with a commitment to make it work.
- Put together an action plan to get you focused.

References:

Friedes P. 2002 [The 2R Manager](#) Jossey-Bass

* To find out more about the only Australian 2R Manager workshop and the important management skills of relating and requiring click this link:

<http://www.icleadership.com.au/2RManager>

Henry Blatman
Leadership and Performance Coach
Ph: 61 3 9699 7771