Have you ever been on the receiving end of a performance review when something comes up that you had no idea about?

Unfortunately, a lot of managers do this.

They wait until the performance review to address performance issues.

This is terrible leadership for several reasons, the most important of which is that you as a leader are responsible for setting up your team for success.

That includes addressing performance issues as they arise so that staff can do something about it and get back on track to reach their goals.

One of my favorite blog posts I ever wrote is about how performance review conversation should be the most boring conversation you have with your team all year.

Meaning that everything that shows up on there you've talked about before and nothing is a surprise.

No more surprises.

You are called to be as transparent as you can.

Be as honest as you can be with your team so that they can shift gears if necessary to set the goals that are expected of them.

When something comes up don't wait.

Address the conversation and address it knowing that you don't have all the information.

Just because you heard or saw something doesn't mean that's the full truth.

Set up a time to talk with your staff about it, but don't assume, don't accuse, and don't judge.

Come to that conversation with an open mind and say, 'this is what I heard' or 'this is what I saw. What do you think about what happened?' or 'From your perspective, what happened? And why did it happen that way?'

Get to the bottom of it and then have your focus be on how to fix it going forward.

The ultimate goal of addressing performance issues is to get it right.

It's not to build a case to fire someone.

It's not to set them up for failure.

It's to stop whatever is going on that you don't want to be going on and to give them the support and tools and resources they need to get back on track and reach the goals they're expected to reach.

Having said that, you should be documenting everything that's going on with your team.

There is a possibility that it might result in a firing at some point in time, but that's not the only reason you should be documenting.

When it comes to things like performance review, we have a recency bias where we tend to think about the last couple of months instead of thinking of all the things that have happened over the course of a year.

If your staff is able to turn it around and they start performing in a way that meets expectations, it's great documentation to be able to look back and say, 'here's where you were back in February. Look at how much you've grown since then.'

It's a great chance for you to recognize all the growth that your staff has had.

Why do performance issues pop up?

Well, we're human.

Of course, there are going to be places where all of us don't meet the expectations, but there are lots of reasons why people don't meet expectations.

It could be any combination of these things and probably other things that aren't listed here, too.

It starts with the fact that a lot of people don't even know about the expectation.

As leaders, we like to think we're a lot more clear in our communication than we are.

Sometimes we just assume things that aren't true.

Making sure to start that staff actually know about that expectation.

The second one is do they understand it?

Did they not meet the expectation because they didn't really understand what the expectation was?

Or maybe they didn't have the knowledge or skill they needed to fulfill that expectation.

Or the resources or the capability or the time.

Finally, maybe they just didn't care.

This last one happens.

Of course, there are staff out there who don't care.

But this is the one we jump to most often and mostly erroneously because it can be any number of these other things.

In moments of frustration, that's often where our mind goes- this staff just doesn't care.

Be careful if your mind always goes there.

Make sure you're really getting to the bottom of why that expectation wasn't met.

Depending on why that expectation wasn't met is going to inform what you do about it.

In the first couple cases where they weren't even aware of it or they didn't understand it then as the leader, this is your opportunity to clarify.

This is your expectation.

Here's how you do it.

Here's what success looks like with this goal.

Then check for understanding to make sure you both are on the same page.

The next grouping is when they didn't have what they needed whether it's a resource, a skill, or the time.

If you still want them to be the one who's responsible for that expectation, then as their leader you need to give them what they need, whether it's a training or some resource or take something else off their plate so that they have the time to complete it.

If they simply don't have the capability, this becomes a tough decision for you as a leader.

Can you take this expectation away from them and give it to someone else on the team and maybe swap it out for something else?

Or is it necessary for them to have the capability to perform this thing in order to perform their current job?

If that's the case, and it's a good worker and they're positive and you don't want to lose them, can you maybe give them a different position or adjust responsibilities?

This one can be tricky, especially if they've been a really positive member on your team.

But the last one's not so difficult.

If you have somebody who doesn't care there is no reason for them to be on your team.

You cannot make people care.

If you find out that it's none of these things and it's simply that they don't really care about the work they're doing then you need to do everything you can to get them off your team.

Performance issues are going to arise.

This is part of work.

This is part of being human and it doesn't always need to be the big deal that we make it out to be.

If we go into it with a mindset that people are going to make mistakes, that they're going to mess up, that they're going to fail to meet some of the expectations that they have, then we can just treat it as the inevitable thing it is and as the leader, work with them so that they have everything they need to meet that expectation.

So, the most important question for you is, how will you effectively address performance issues on your team?