



Most of the time when people reach out to me for help, they're reaching out to fix something that's gone wrong.

This is natural. We do this in many areas of our life, but we don't always spend as much time and energy on the proactive side, and we know that the more proactive we can be the more we can get ahead of the problems and the easier it's going to be in the long run.

Even if we are incredibly proactive and we set all the right boundaries and expectations, of course things still go wrong. That's the nature of working with people.

But the more we can set ourselves up for success on the front end, the more successful we're going to be. A huge huge part of that is setting and reinforcing expectations and boundaries.

The setting is usually the easy part. Being consistent and following through is where most of the challenges come from.

This is really shocking to me every time I see it- and I see it a lot; I use this data point a lot- Gallup has found that just about half of people don't even know what's expected from them at work.

They could be doing something really amazing and it has nothing to do with what they're supposed to be doing. This holds true not just for their tasks, but in the way that their relationships show up, particularly their relationship with you as their supervisor.

Research shows that people would rather have a consistently bad boss where they know what to expect than a boss that's some days wonderful and some days terrible and they never know what to expect.

People like to know what to expect and they absolutely need to know it to be successful at their jobs. Gallup also tells us the number one thing people need to be successful is knowing what is expected of them, so start early and often when you're setting expectations and boundaries. It's not enough to say it once and then when something goes wrong say *well, I told you*.

That's not how people learn. That's not how people grow. It's a constant reinforcement of these expectations and boundaries.

You need to start with the basics. What are the basic expectations and boundaries at your work in terms of things like communication channels or dress codes or whatever policies you have?

What are their tasks for the job? How do they get paid? What time do they need to submit their timesheets to get paid? All those things that go into our work. Start from the basics and reinforce it again and again and again. Probably way more times than you think should be necessary.



People are inundated with lots of information, particularly when they're starting a new job. It's just so much to handle.

What are your communication expectations? Is it okay for your staff to text you? If so, is it only between certain hours? If they need to call out sick is a text okay, or do they need to call you?

Whatever your expectations are- I'm not here to tell you what they should be- but what I will say is that they should be absolutely crystal clear.

Make sure that they know because you don't want to find yourself in a situation saying *well, they should know not to text me on the weekend.*

Apparently, they don't.

Make your expectations really clear.

What are your expectations around punctuality and deadlines? Be very clear and consistent with those.

Your important policies.

Feedback- giving and receiving.

I really like the method when it comes to performance reviews and evaluations of letting staff know during their orientation what they're going to be evaluated on. It should match up really closely with their job description.

Tell them how it works to get promoted or to get raises or what the scoring system is on the evaluation. That stuff shouldn't be a secret. It's there to help them do their job well and fulfill expectations.

Let them know those processes as early as possible. Be very sure not to make promises you can't and shouldn't keep.

I know that the inclination to do this, especially as a new manager, is to be available and support your staff in any way you can but it's not possible and it's not the best use of your time.

You have to set up boundaries around your time. This is how I like to think of it. First like a college professor. Set some office hours, Designate and share times you'll be in your office catching up on email or doing some busy work that doesn't require a lot of deep thought when you will be available to answer questions.

This could be a consistent time every week, or it might change week to week. If you have the ability to share your availability with your staff through a shared Google Calendar or whatever then do that.



Whatever way you can, be clear about when you are accessible and when you're not.

Think like a college professor and then think like a hotel guest- do not disturb.

We almost never do this and it's a disservice, because when we're doing work that requires a lot of thought, if we are trying to fill out a grant application or a grant report or we're trying to think about who to hire or we're trying to change our hiring process or deal with the challenging situation at work, we need time to think without interruption and we almost never give it to ourselves.

Find time in your schedule to block it off and let people know you are not available. It might be the same week to week or it might change.

Let your staff know that you won't be getting back to them during these times.

Of course, emergencies happen, but your definition of an emergency is probably different than your staff's. There's a lot of conversation around those expectations of what actually constitutes an emergency.

The last one- think like a DMV employee- no disrespect to DMV employees out there-

The joke is that you go to the DMV and you wait there all day. I don't think that happens too much anymore, hopefully, but in the old days that was the running joke. You take the number like you're in a deli line and you just sit there and wait all day.

The thinking there is, *I'll get to you when I get to you.*

Remember the Eisenhower Matrix. Not everything is urgent. Not everything is an emergency. You can't expect to drop everything.

Set the expectation that you'll get back to all your emails within 24 hours or 6 or 48 or whatever is feasible for you.

Be clear about what those expectations are, so your staff know when to expect to hear back from you.

Always always match your actions with your words. That is going to be the best way to reinforce boundaries and expectations. Walking the walk and not just verbalizing what you want. Also putting that into your own actions. Avoid some of these common mistakes either saying them out loud or if they're just running through your head.

Check yourself a little bit when you're saying things like, *I already told you that* or you're attributing meaning to something that someone did when you have no idea why they did what they did, but in your brain you say, *'oh you just did that because you don't care about this job* or *you're not a very good worker* or whatever you tell yourself.



*My door is always open.*

It should not be and it won't be so don't set up that expectation.

*I shouldn't have to tell you.*

This is a big one.

*You're a professional and you should know how to do this thing.*

In a perfect world, they would, but in many cases they're not going to so you have to articulate it.

The next one is sort of tricky. This is one I have wrestled with over the years.

*I shouldn't have to remind you.*

I used to stick to this really, really closely and it ended up hurting me in the end because I wouldn't get what I needed from my team. So I ended up setting up systems where they were sent reminders.

I'm still kind of back and forth about that, but it did get me what I needed on time most of the time.

*I just don't like confrontation, so I'm not going to deal with this.*

And a mentality that I have to punish it, that it has to be about punishment rather than growth.

When violations do happen of your expectations and boundaries- and of course they're going to again and again and again-don't accuse or assume.

Always give your staff an opportunity to explain what happened. Reiterate the expectation, make sure they're clear. Check for understanding about what the expectation is and coach them through it.

Find out what they need to be successful.

If it's repeated behavior, if it's really egregious, if it's getting in the way of them being able to do their job, then you can step it up and talk about things like performance plans, suspensions, and even firing.

Before it gets to that level, work with them on how to reach those expectations.

So, something for you to think about is what expectations do you have for your staff?

And how do they know?