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6 Questions to Ask Yourself When You're Frustrated with Your Team

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Being a leader has always been challenging, but manager stress and burnout are rising: A November 2021 [Gallup survey](#) found that 35% of managers reported feeling burned out “very often or always,” compared to 27% of individual contributors and 22% of leaders.

Managers may have a short fuse when it's a constant mental strain to get the work done. This is the opposite of what your employees need. In healthy workplace cultures, leaders know how to balance accountability for results with empathy. One way to do this is to aim for reflection instead of reaction. When frustration and judgment hover, cultivate curiosity and ask yourself the following six questions.

1. HAVE I BEEN CLEAR ABOUT EXPECTED WORK OUTCOMES?

Leaders often underestimate the need to communicate. Reflect on how effectively you've shared your expectations regarding roles, deliverables, support and results. Identifying what success looks like for a particular project in terms of quality and desired impact can enable others to organize their time, energy and other resources more effectively.

2. ARE MY EXPECTATIONS REASONABLE?

Consider the assignment and compare it with similar work you've delegated in the past. Is the current project adequately resourced? If not, you may need to find additional resources or scale back your own expectations.

3. WHAT DO I KNOW TO BE TRUE ABOUT THIS EMPLOYEE?

When you're frustrated with an individual's performance, take a step back and remember the whole person. Assess their knowledge, skills and abilities. Reflect on their strengths and areas for growth. Some people may enjoy and do better with greater autonomy, while others prefer more communication, support and connection.

4. AM I MANAGING TO RESULTS?

Successful managers focus on outcomes rather than how or when the work gets done. We all possess unique working styles and preferences. Your way may not be the natural route for others, so beware of the bias toward your own style.

5. AM I HOLDING EVERYONE TO THE SAME STANDARD?

Despite our best intentions, unconscious bias can cause us to favor some people over others. Understanding the uniqueness of the employee at hand, consider whether you're holding all team members to the same standard. Are you tougher on men, women or people of color? Do you invest

time equally in your team's development? Having clarity on results can also help you avoid unconscious bias.

6. AM I PROVIDING ACTIONABLE FEEDBACK THAT IS CLEAR, FIRM AND KIND?

If you have concerns or criticism of the work, don't delay your feedback. Research shows that feedback is best given in the flow of work. Reach out as soon as a potential misalignment appears. It's much better to catch it early and not let issues fester.

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Self-reflection takes discipline and time — and the investment is worth the reward. Companies with managers who cultivate strong relationships with their employees experience higher loyalty, trust, productivity and joy. Use these reflection questions as a guide to bridge any gaps in your expectations. Making the conscious decision to drive performance from empathy is the difference between the true competitive advantage — discretionary effort — and punching the clock. These actions differentiate managers from leaders. #WednesdayWisdom

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