

MENTOR MINUTE QUICK CAREER ADVICE FROM EXPERT EILEEN CHADNICK

That time of year: performance report cards

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SEPTEMBER 17, 2008

The scenario

One of my staff wants to discuss his performance review scores, which he believes are low, although he doesn't dispute the comments I gave in the report. I expect he will want me to adjust his scores higher. How do I best handle this request? If I change them, will that be giving the wrong impression as a manager, that maybe I am weak?

The advice

What if this conversation wasn't just about negotiating scores but rather an opportunity to have a meaningful dialogue about his performance and expectations going forward?

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Written reviews usually serve as a starting point for a more detailed conversation. As a leader you have the opportunity - and likely the obligation - to effectively communicate, listen, engage and support those who report to you. Having an open discussion about performance is an important part of that relationship.

Here are some points to consider.

An open mind

Focus on doing the right thing - not on being right. This is really the overriding principle. Your concern about looking weak if you change scores is misguided. Great leaders keep open mindsets and welcome dialogue that appropriately challenges them. You'll gain far more respect from your staff if you show a genuine effort to listen, consider their views, communicate directly and empathetically - and to support them in their development. In the end, if it makes sense to change this fellow's scores - then you'll have done the right thing as a leader.

Ask questions

Remember, the meeting request was initiated by your staff member. Don't assume it's just about scores. Ask him what he'd like out of the discussion and to share his perspective on his performance. Get curious and truly listen. He may offer a perspective that you hadn't considered that would be meaningful to this process.

Be clear

Make sure you communicate respectfully, clearly and empathetically. If scores are still important - then be very specific about what it would take to earn a higher score. When addressing performance issues, substantiate with specific examples and check to ensure he understands what you are saying. At the same time, don't forget to acknowledge his strengths and successes. Performance discussions never should be only about what needs to be fixed - but also should reinforce what's already working and recognize the individual's strengths and successes.

Strategize

Once you've established agreement on the needs and opportunities for further development, take time to develop specific goals and strategies. Rather than prescribing solutions - invite his input and collaborate on the development plan. He'll be more engaged if he is part of the solution. Ideally, you should also build in structures for follow-up and accountability along the way so you can both monitor his success and constructively help him deal with any challenges that come up.

In summary, remember that leadership is a process not a position. If you set the intention to do the right thing and show up with an open mindset and a genuine caring, you'll be setting a solid foundation to help you navigate this important leadership opportunity.

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