

Staying Focused on Results

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Summary - Business conversations are essentially goal driven conversations. Most of the time managers and employees are focused on results but sometimes they get sidetracked. Here are some suggestions to stay results oriented in challenging circumstances.

We are often struck by how results oriented many people in business are. It seems to come naturally to many of them to constantly keep an eye on the outcomes they want to achieve. It seems fair to say that business conversations are essentially goal driven conversations. However, in situations of adversity both managers and employees seem to lose that focus.

Whenever there are obstacles, when there is delay, when people don't perform like intended, it seems only natural to become more directive, more outspoken and to generate pressure in order to speed up the process of getting results. A patient, soft spoken, thoughtful, style of management seems to be the last thing that is asked for. Rather, such a style is viewed as conflicting with a results focus and should be avoided. After all, how can you create sense urgency when you act patiently and understanding?

In such cases the drive for results is usually still there but it somehow does not translate into real progress toward the goal. Instead, people seem to get sidetracked by starting to focus more on what they want to do then on what they want to achieve. For instance, they may take disagreement as a personal affront and only seem to want to get their anger out and 'tell it like it is' to their colleagues. Or they may turn to a highly directive and authoritative approach in order to motivate an employee.

However logical these behaviors may appear, they will nearly always have an adverse impact. Telling it like it is, getting mad, getting overly bossy will most likely bring achievement of the goal further out of sight. People will probably respond defensive, hurt, or angry when confronted with these behaviors. Or they may comply against their

will and grow less committed to their work and organizations because of that.

Do tough situations mainly require tough talk? No. We say quite the opposite. We have often seen that a direct, authoritative approach creates obstacles to achieving goals rather than that it is helpful. To become truly outcome focused in these challenging situations we argue for a very deliberate approach which squarely puts the desired results central. We suggest to pause for a second and ask yourself some of the following questions:

What is the outcome I want? What do I want to achieve from this conversation? Is my priority to just to feel better here and now or do I want to get the job done? What can this person contribute to achieving the goal? How do we get there together? What worked well with this person before?

This kind of conversation makes it much easier for the other person to feel understood and appreciated and will make it therefore much likelier that he will join you in trying to improve the situation. Although this approach is much friendlier and more likable than the authoritative one, that is not the primary reason to do it like that. We believe business is not being friendly and about liking each other. Instead we are convinced that a critical task for anyone in business is delivering results. We don't only mean financial results; results can be anything that contributes to achieving the purpose of the organization.

Do we deny the importance of feelings and of the quality of relationships? Not in the least. The paradox is that being effective as a team in the sense that it delivers results may be one of the most important prerequisites of having a good time together and liking and appreciating each other. The opposite goes too. It is almost impossible to keep on liking and enjoying each others company when results keep on lacking.

Don't get angry, impatient or bossy. Instead focus on desired results and how you and the other person (people) can co-operate to make progress. It is not necessarily easy to do this. Research has shown that in stressful situations people tend to start thinking in simple terms and rely more on directive approaches. But deliberately choosing the attitude we propagate helps and makes the task feasible. Once you experience the advantages more and more it will become easier to keep on choosing it.