

Coaching Skill

Expectation Vs. Agreement

What the skill is:

At the heart of many personal and professional conflicts is a simple truth. We expect others to think and behave in a certain way, most often the way we ourselves would behave. And when they don't, we think there is something wrong, and we get upset.

Often we aren't even aware we have the expectations. They are so subtle and ingrained in our personal experience, we can't imagine that others don't share them.

Here is a story from my life that illustrates what I mean:

Several years ago we hosted a young man from Bosnia in our home. He had come to this country to escape the violence there, and to attend private high school. We took him in, fed him, bought him clothes, drove him to school and attended school meetings as his guardians. We noticed after a month or two that he never said 'thank you' - no matter what we did for him. We began to feel irritated, even angry. We judged him as rude and entitled. Finally, we actually spoke to him about it (even coaches take a while to catch on sometimes). It turned out that in his culture, it was considered rude to say 'thank you' to family. Family does things for family, and to say 'thank you' is to treat family like a stranger. Once we understood this cultural difference, we were able to tell him how WE felt, and to ask for his agreement to say 'thank you' as a way of communicating his awareness of what was being done for him, not just by our family, but by other Americans who would expect the same thing.

The story highlights the difference between the expectation and agreement mindsets.

Coach and author, Steve Chandler (www.stevechandler.com), is a great teacher on this topic. Here's what he says:

You have two choices in your relationships with others. You can have relationships based on expectations or relationships based on agreements.

Expectations are cowardly and self-defeating. They are cowardly because by expecting things of others, I place all responsibility outside myself. I expect my co-worker to do his job right, I expect my family member to behave a certain way, and the list goes on. When I am unhappy it's because of them. Expectations lead to disappointments. It's a miserable life expecting so much of others and suffering so much disappointment and betrayal.

Agreements are courageous and creative. They honor the other person. They are co-authored between two composers of the agreement. People give their word and keep it.

People honor agreements to a far greater degree than they live up to expectations. They feel stressed when their head is full of expectations of them. They feel pressure and resentment. They rebel. (Ever notice? Do you have children? Employees?)

But create a good agreement? Both sides win.

Purpose and Benefits:

1. Allows you to identify when you or your 'mentee' are making assumptions or having expectations.
2. Let's you transform those into solid, small agreements that have a higher likelihood of being kept.
3. Let's you help your 'mentee' identify the outcome they are really looking for.
4. Helps build the little successes that build on each other over time.
5. Creates greater ownership and personal responsibility.

Examples of the Distinction

- A. I expect my 'mentee' to be in communication with me.
- B. My 'mentee' and I have an agreement that if they lose their phone, they will go to the library and post a message on my Facebook page.
- A. I expect my 'mentee' to do all the things they said they wanted to do at our meeting.
- B. My 'mentee' and I have an agreement that they will take one ten minute action on a specific day and a specific time and then let me know they have taken it.
- A. We expect our mentors to fill out their status reports fully and on time.
- B. Our mentors make the agreement they feel they can make about reporting, including telling Mentor staff what kind of support they need to keep the agreement and what they would like done if they don't keep the agreement they've made.

Practice Skill in Role Play:

Scenario: Your Participant's phone number is constantly changing and it is incredibly difficult to get ahold of him. When you do schedule a meeting, he does not show up to about half of those meetings.
Q: What should you do?

Coach: Using deep listening and open ended questions, assist your partner in getting clear about what they want to agree to.

Assist them in creating a mutually satisfying (something that works for both of you) agreement about talking and meeting, with or without a phone.

Ask them to clearly state what the agreement is, what support they need to keep it, and what you two agree to do if the agreement gets broken.