

Teach Employees the Business Facts of Life

by : Dave Anderson

Effective leaders keep their people out of a gray area by setting and clarifying expectations for them. Frankly, your team deserves to know where you and they stand on performance issues. This eliminates confusion and guesswork that wastes time and resources. Here are a few of my personal favorite business facts of life. Some may seem harsh and politically incorrect. However, their directness is vital to building and sustaining a vibrant, performance-based culture.

1. It's OK not to like a part of your job, but it's not OK to not do it. In fact, I don't expect you to like everything about your job. That's why we pay you to do it. If you loved everything about your job we'd have to turn the workplace into an amusement park and charge you admission for being here.
2. Everyone on this team has an equal voice, but that doesn't mean you get a vote. This is not a democracy. I will listen, but I will also decide.
3. Everyone will be held to the same high standard of work ethic, customer care and character. Beyond that, I will treat you in a manner you have earned and deserve and will invest my time and resources accordingly. I will give my best to the best and less to the rest. I will run a meritocracy, not a welfare state.
4. You are expected to prove yourself every day. Tenure, credentials and years of experience don't substitute for results. No one is paying you to pace yourself or budget your efforts.
5. I will work with you as long as you continue to make measurable progress in reasonable time. However, if you reach a point where you hover at or below average performance levels with no upward trend, I will lose interest in you. I do not endeavor to become a savior of lost causes or immerse myself in endless rescue missions.
6. I not only expect you to work hard on the job, I expect you to work hard on yourself. If you don't grow, you go. The day you stop bringing something of value to the table is the day I no longer have use for you.
7. My pay plan, bonuses and incentive programs will reward above-average performers and above-average results, only. I will not subsidize or legitimize mediocrity by rewarding unworthy performances.
8. When promotions are available, they will go to the most qualified member of the team regardless of longevity, gender or ethnic background. I'm running a business, not the Royal Family. I have created an environment hostile to an Affirmative Action mindset. If the most qualified candidate for promotion is a white, Anglo Saxon, Protestant male, he will get the job. On the other hand, if it is a purple, physically challenged lesbian, the job goes to her.
9. I expect you to focus on what you can control and never assume a martyr's mindset to explain away your lack of success. Regardless of outside conditions, your inside decisions will determine your success. Even in the worst of times you can control your attitude, your discipline and your character choices and I will expect you to do so.
10. I measure loyalty by performance, not the number of years you cash my paychecks. The most disloyal thing you can do is to stop getting results. Loyalty is not the amount of time you put in; it's what you put into the time.

11. I will give you consistent and brutally honest feedback on your performance. If you are great, I will tell you. If you are failing, I will tell you. If you are ever unsure of where you stand, ask me.
12. I expect you to choose the truth over harmony. Make the right decision, not the convenient one.
13. You are to lead your people deliberately and avoid doing what comes naturally. If you are having a bad day, suck it up and bear it. Don't put it on your sleeve and wear it or share it. Since everyone you work with has their own problems there is no need to share yours.
14. I will train you and invest in your development but I also expect you to invest in yourself. In fact, if you don't invest in yourself, why should anyone else?
15. I expect you to lead by personal example, not personal convenience. This means you must commit yourself to a cause and not commit the cause to yourself. The day you put your personal agenda ahead of the teams' is the day you must leave my organization.
16. If you lie, cheat or steal I will fire you. There will be no second chance.
17. I expect you to add value to others on your team. Be a giver and not just a taker. If you are in it just for yourself you're in a mighty small business.
18. When dealing with others I expect you to practice one rule: the Golden Rule. This is not an option.
19. If you have personal problems that affect your work, I will listen, advise and try to help you. However, you are expected to work through the paradox of solving your personal problems while you continue to get results on the job. Personal problems should not be construed as a license for an indefinite earnings holiday.
20. I expect you to become brilliant in the basics of your job. You don't have to do anything extraordinary on a daily basis. Just do the ordinary things extraordinarily well.
21. I expect you to learn from mistakes and continue to take shots even when you miss. When you hit a wall, learn to bounce, don't splatter.
22. I expect you to avoid repeating the same mistakes. While mistakes are a good investment when you learn from them, repeating the same ones evinces a carelessness that I will not tolerate.
23. I expect you to become an "and then some" person. Do what is required and then some. Hit your numbers and then some. Keep your promise and then some.
24. Don't whine, gossip or complain on my time. Workplace wimps will be ridiculed and removed.
25. I don't tolerate skunks that make the numbers. Thus, I will measure you by two metrics: performance expectations and behavioral expectations. Not only do I expect you to perform the technical part of your job well, I expect you to share the company core values. If you make the numbers but don't live the values you are expendable.

Author Max DePree wrote that the first responsibility of a leader is to define reality. That's exactly what the business facts of life in your organization accomplish. Lift the fog off your expectations. It's hard for your people to be aggressive when they are confused.