

How's Your Communication with Employees?

A story I heard over a decade ago has always stuck with me to underscore the importance of communication. It goes something like this: A man sitting on a park bench overheard a young woman talking on her cell phone (when I originally heard this story the woman was talking on a pay phone). The woman asked the person on the other end of the line if she could speak to the human resources manager at the business.

Once she had the manager on the phone, she stated she applied for a job with the company a few weeks prior and was wondering if the job was still open. The man watched as the young woman kept a calm expression on her face while listening to the person on the other end. Finally, the woman said, "I am glad to hear you hired someone who meets your expectations. It is nice to hear you are happy with your choice and I hope everything works well for you in the future."

As the young woman hung up from the call, the man on the park bench apologized for listening to her conversation. He also said, "I am sorry you didn't get the job, but you certainly were gracious on the phone. With that attitude, I am sure you will find employment soon." The young woman smiled and said, "Oh, I was hired for that job two weeks ago. I just had to find out how I was doing!"

This story serves as a great reminder that employees want feedback. They want to know how they are doing. So often, managers only let their staff know when they've done something wrong. Strive to be the leader (or the parent) who provides feedback for positive performance by employees (and children) as well.

"It's hard [for employees] to feel pride and ownership when they don't understand where things are going."

— Jason Fried

Taking pride in a task

A similar story about communication came from an *Inc.* magazine column written by Jason Fried, co-founder of a Chicago-based software company. In his column, Fried explained he had a small team of about 10 staff working on a big new project for the company — but that meant about 805 of the company's staff were left out of the loop on the project. Fried figured he'd clue them in as the project progressed. But instead, confusion and rumors began to spread, and the lack of communication caused some division within the company.

Fried realized, "We have a great vision, but it had been locked away in the heads of a few people...It's easy to forget, as a leader, that when employees don't get the wide view, not only does the point of their work escape them, but it can also lead to real frustration. It's hard to feel pride and ownership when you don't understand where things are going."

I think Fried's last line bears repeating because it is so true, no matter what business you are in: "It's hard [for employees] to feel pride and ownership when they don't understand where things are going."

If you are a manager or a leader of a group, let these stories be a wake-up call and realize that no employees like doing their daily tasks in the dark. **HW**