

Directions

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This article appeared in our March 2009 email newsletter. *We welcome your comments on any of our articles. Send an email to info@ecdavis.com.*

Tips for the Times: Help for Leaders and Managers

By Tommy Davis, aka "Robin Ready"

For many of our readers, Robin Ready of Team Manager Development Center fame is an old friend. And no one plays the role of Robin better than Tommy. For that reason, Tommy is starting his column offering Robin's "take" on critical competencies for team leaders during challenging times. Whether you are a front line team leader or a senior manager, as Robin would say, "Listen up!"

As a team leader it's a big part of your job to help the team remain positive and productive. Team members need an environment where they experience confidence, trust, and satisfaction if they are going to perform effectively. They're counting on you to help build and maintain that environment. They will take their cues from you.

So, if your own confidence levels are a little wobbly, take a step back, and revisit your personal belief system. *You know* that as bad as things seem right now, most good people and good organizations adjust, survive, and go on to thrive. Your team is much more likely to rally behind you if you can be steady and positive and find ways to motivate and build their confidence in spite of all the turmoil and change.

Let's review a few TMDC Leadership Competencies and offer some Tips that Robin thinks good leaders might be able to use right now.

- **Performance Standards.** *(You should know that Robin never focuses first on the warm and fuzzy stuff.)*

Provide clarity to questions of effort, performance and outcome. Help others feel and see that the efforts they are undertaking will achieve the expected performance and provide satisfying outcomes. Take time to meet with the team and engage in dialogue that leads to objectives the team will support with confidence, trust and satisfaction. Clearly reinforce performance expectations. (Write them down, post them, chart results and get people focused.) If there seems to be confusion or a problem, stop quickly and ask what is going on; help everyone get back on track as quickly as possible.

- **Communications.** *(Always a biggie, communications skills are a top priority in stressful periods.)*

Please keep the team informed, involved and engaged. Ask good questions (open-ended and thought provoking). Examples of such questions are: Can we outline *together* the steps required to achieve these expectations? What skills sets will we have to build? Do you have the resources and authority you need to proceed? How can I help? Coming up with positive solutions to these questions will also build confidence, trust and satisfaction - but be careful to not jump the gun and run ahead to solutions before knowing what the root causes are.

Focus on your listening, questioning, verbal and nonverbal communication. Remember to maintain eye contact. Do not interrupt. Repeat back or paraphrase what you think was said. Express your thoughts and ideas without rambling -- be clear and to the point. Allow people time to think and respond to you when you raise questions -- don't just immediately fill in the void with your own answer! Drawing others out usually gains their support and buy-in.

- **Flexibility & Adaptability.** Flexibility seems to be the name of the game during challenging times. (*And many of us are beginning to feel like pretzels about now – right?*)

You're going to have to help the team through all that flexing. When things feel out of control or are about to reach a crisis, try to take a deep breath and communicate about how everyone is feeling and then call a quick "time out" to gain control of emotions and the situation. Seek information to determine what others are thinking about the issues before stating your viewpoint or giving a lot of directions. Then focus on objective problem-solving (Assess, Plan, and then Act).

When others are able to see you are adaptable and in control, they are more willing and able to forge ahead with confidence, trust and satisfaction on their own.

- **Situational Sensitivity & Responsiveness.**

Look for every opportunity to provide supportive feedback and encouragement. The team may be feeling unsettled and fearful. They need to learn to cope with the new order of things. Show sensitivity and responsiveness by allowing some time for closure to the past, transitioning from that past, getting familiar with the new, and building a new routine. Find ways to spend more time close to your team members, looking and listening for cues about how they are feeling and reacting. Be proactive in demonstrating interest in them as people, not just as extensions to their machines or tasks. Make it easy for people to talk with you and if things appear to be different, check it out - ask!

In summary, stay focused on your team's need for confidence, trust and satisfaction and your own role in helping make it happen – especially right now. Stop and think about these few tips and Robin believes you will handle things much better.

Robin (Tommy) is interested in your thoughts and questions about leading teams, and will continue to try to address your challenges with useful tips in upcoming newsletters. Send your comments to info@ecdavis.com.