

## ***Building a lighthouse***

While driving from the Valley to Halifax early one morning recently I was faced with the task of driving Hwy. 101 through fog. This reminded me that for many employees going to work each day can be a similar challenge, due to a lack of clearly defined and understood behavioral expectations. Those are all the different behaviors that are expected to be performed and the standard of performance for an assigned role.

Whenever there's a gap between a manager's and employee's expectations this can facilitate a fog that impacts productivity, morale and efficiency.

So today let's explore how to build a lighthouse in regard to behavioral expectations to assist employees and managers from encountering unnecessary fog.

What process do you use to define behavioral expectations with your employees? Are your employees performing to the standards you are expecting?

If not, I've learned from my experience in coaching both managers and employees who are frustrated around behavioral expectations that the root cause is often a lack of agreement on what the behavioral expectations are.

When employees are in a fog as to what is expected of them this often leads to an increase in frustration, stress, judging and complaining. And if the fog does not lift it can lead to employee-manager conflict, employee disengagement and performance issues.

Framing behavioral expectations in a clear and precise manner by using a structured process can help reduce the incidence of fog. And agreed upon behavioral expectations that are understood and agreed to upfront can provide a light that guides success for both employee and manager.

Behavioral expectations can be framed in three stages:

**Define expectations** – Before providing any direction the manager needs to be clear on exactly what the behavioral expectations are for each employee role, how they will be communicated and taught, and how success will be monitored and measured. A final step is due diligence to ensure all behavioral expectations have been defined correctly and are aligned with the business objectives, corporate values and all policies, agreements and legislation.

**Deliver expectations** – When delivering behavioral expectations, provide employees with all information you have prepared in the first stage and allow an opportunity for questions. A best practice is to provide behavioral expectations



in writing whenever possible, to give a training aid to learn. Remove assumption by testing the employee to be sure they can perform the behavioral expectations to the desired standard and provide support and training when needed. Outline how performance will be reported on a regular basis (e.g., performance management model).

**Manage expectations** – If a new employee is not performing at the desired standard it's important not to assume they are not willing or not capable. Be sure the first two stages have been completed, factor in the learning curve, and provide coaching and feedback throughout.

When an employee performs at the desired standard, acknowledge and recognize good work. Too many managers get into the habit of only engaging their workforce when there's a problem. We all like hearing we are doing a good job; it helps keep us motivated and on the right track.

Never surprise an employee with a list of what behavioral expectations they are not meeting. Deal with problems in an open and collaborative manner, one at a time.

If an employee is clear and understands the expectations and chooses not to achieve them, ensure they are clear of the consequences for not performing and allow them the right to make their choice.

The above process of building expectations is similar to building and operating a lighthouse. You need to have a solid foundation to build on; you must know what direction you are pointed in; and you need to keep checking to ensure all systems are working so that employees have a guide for both avoiding and getting through the fog of unclear expectations.

