

# Leadership Development: 5 Reactive Mistakes Leaders Should Always Avoid...

## ...and how to Respond consistently in challenging times

Think about the last time you were inside a McDonald's fast food restaurant. Now, imagine you are standing at the front counter. Where is the french fry machine? If you said back to the left, you know your McDonald's restaurant – maybe too well. In a recent workshop, I had someone who had not been in a McDonald's for about 10 years, and he immediately knew the answer. Why?

The simple response comes in a single word – consistency. That word, consistency, is an important word to remember when discussing leadership development. Regardless of the surroundings, successful team leaders are consistent in their responses, duties, and actions.

Ironically the one thing that is consistent in most businesses is the lack of consistency; both in the organizational dynamics and the way that teams are directed. Your success or failure as a team leader depends on your ability to consistently keep your team moving in the right direction with confidence. How you react or respond is critical.

Think about going to the doctor. They give you some medication and want to see you in a few days. When you return, you are feeling worse and your doctor says, your body is having a 'reaction' to the medication. Another possible situation is when you return to your doctor, you are feeling better, and your doctor says your body is 'responding' to the medication. One is positive and one is negative.

Consistent response is a key to successful leadership and critical for maintaining positive team direction. Here are five examples of reaction-based behaviors compared to more positive responses. Take a moment to reflect on the benefits of responding rather than reacting, as a leader.

## BEHAVIOR #1

### REACTION

Allowing emotions to control you: This is a common mistake of leaders at all levels, and while the initial response of yelling may make you feel better, the reality is that you may cause long term damage and erode trust. When you increase your volume you are reacting and subject yourself to a losing situation

### RESPONSE

The most effective leaders maintain their composure by something many of our parents taught us as children – count to 10 before you take an action. Take a few seconds, then

make sure that you maintain your voice modulation. By maintaining your volume, you are able to positively respond to the situation. While others may choose to raise their voice, when you maintain your composure, you will be better able to reach a positive resolution.

## **BEHAVIOR #2**

### **REACTION**

Pushing blame to a person when there is a mistake: When there is a mistake (and there will be mistakes) it is easy to immediately push blame to the person who made the mistake. It is just as common for team members to place blame as well. This becomes counterproductive and erodes trust at every level.

### **RESPONSE**

Successful leaders do not allow finger pointing, preferring to focus on moving forward. They keep in mind that they cannot change the past and that moving forward is the only way to achieve success. This response will help develop trust between you and the team and display strong leadership skills to everyone on the team.

## **BEHAVIOR #3**

### **REACTION**

Withholding information from the team: When leaders withhold information, fear and distrust develop among team members. By leaving them in the dark, team members will typically assume the worst and spread rumors. Additionally, when you withhold information, it demonstrates that you are uncomfortable and concerned that someone on your team may actually take your position in the future.

### **RESPONSE**

Successful and secure leaders know that sharing knowledge and information builds strong teams and allows the team to focus on results. It focuses on what can be accomplished rather than fostering conjecture and rumor.

## **BEHAVIOR #4**

### **REACTION**

Comparing team members to each other: While it is great to recognize outstanding employees, pitting employees against each other is actually a de-motivator. Trying to get everyone to do the same thing the same way can reduce a leader's influence and result in motivation issues within the team.

### **RESPONSE**

Successful leaders evaluate and challenge employees on an individual basis. They recognize and focus on individual strengths and weaknesses to build a cohesive team.

## **BEHAVIOR #5**

### **REACTION**

Demonstrating and sharing your sense of urgency: Face value says this can be a good response and it may achieve short term success while delivering long term challenges. Admittedly, some problems do need to be solved immediately. It is when the leader fosters a sense of panic that emotional instability develops within the team.

Additionally, when this becomes a common practice, when every problem needs to be solved immediately, it become increasingly more difficult to keep all team members on board and secure the buy-in necessary for positive growth. When the leader reacts emotionally and makes every issue an emergency, team members will react in a similar manner.

### **RESPONSE**

Successful leaders know how to remain calm, keep situations clear, and employ measured and calm responses. This calmness allows the leader to set teams in motion in a very confident manner. Likewise, when a leader remains calm and confident, team members will be respond similarly.

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