

13 'Right' Ways For Leaders To Set Expectations With Employees



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If leaders want employees to maximize productivity, get projects completed on time and accurately, and help the business thrive, they must ensure that every team member understands exactly what is expected of them. However, setting clear expectations is sometimes easier said than done within a busy organization, and there are “right” ways and “wrong” ways to do so.

Whether they’re unintentionally unclear, expect too much, or come across as micromanaging, a lot can go wrong when a leader tries to clarify for employees what is going to be expected of them in their roles. Below, members of [Forbes Coaches Council](#) weigh in to discuss 13 “right” ways to set expectations with employees.

1. Provide Clarity, Context And Alignment

Setting expectations is critical in leadership, and research shows many executives are missing the mark on this key element. When setting expectations with employees, it is important to give context. Knowing the “why” and how they play an integral role in the bigger picture not only creates buy-in but also allows for greater commitment to the work, to the team and to reaching the goal. Clarity, context and alignment are key. - [Jackie Insinger, Insinger Insights](#)

2. Speak In Plain Words That Uplift

Feedback sessions are so important, and the manner of the conversation is critical for ensuring alignment between the messaging that is meant to be delivered versus the messaging that is perceived. If it is perceived incorrectly, employees stumble. Communicate in language and words that are not easily misjudged or confused by speaking plainly while also being mindful about

using words that uplift rather than subvert. Allow for pauses and opportunities for Q&A. - [Arthi Rabikrisson](#), [Prerna Advisory](#)

3. Ask Rather Than Tell

How would you feel if you didn't have clarity around what was expected of you? How committed would you be to meeting an expectation that you co-created versus an expectation that was thrust upon you? How would you feel if your manager trusted you to make these sorts of decisions? Leaders who adopt a coaching approach and ask rather than tell will get more buy-in and commitment from their people. - [Jim Livingstone](#), [Northpoint](#)

4. Understand What Success Looks Like

The right way to set expectations with employees is to understand what success looks like for them. Then, align that vision with the expectations of their management and job responsibility. High performance can be achieved with constant communication and feedback amongst the parties as long as all stakeholders have a common denominator of achieving high performance and meeting a shared goal. - [Michelle Perchuk](#), [MTV Coaching](#)

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5. Be Open About What Expectations Are, And Why

The "right" way to set expectations with employees is to be open about what those expectations are, and why. Tell the employee how the expectation helps the leader be a better leader to the employee and team. Most times, employees appreciate expectations if they understand the reasoning behind the expectation and how it helps them. - [Brandy Mabra](#), [Savvy Clover Coaching & Consulting](#)

6. Ensure That Expectations Are Attainable

The best way to set expectations for employees is to make the goals reachable. Expectations have to be attainable and in alignment with the mission and vision of the company in order to be beneficial. Once in alignment and attainable, ensure they are able to be reverse-engineered to achieve daily wins.

These daily wins can be mutually beneficial to all parties involved. - [Jon Dwoskin, The Jon Dwoskin Experience](#)

7. Include Employees In The Expectation-Setting Process

Make it a partnership. Including the employee in the expectation-setting process is a great way to ensure commitment versus compliance. Are they clear on the expectations of the role? What are their ideas for achieving the expectations? How would they measure their performance? Throughout the process, you are building their confidence and can encourage them to set the bar higher to achieve even more. - [Kimberly Svoboda, Aspiration Catalyst®](#)

8. Ask About Employees' Personal Goals

Start by asking what the employee's personal goals are. Would they like a great bonus? A raise? A promotion? An opportunity to develop professionally? Talk to them about how meeting your expectations serves their short- and long-term career goals and how you can support them in achieving them. Let them know that their personal success is as important to you as the success of the company. - [Steve McIntosh, CareerPoint.com](#)

9. Communicate The Vision Clearly And Simply

Clearly and simply communicate the organization's vision and team goals. Break that down further to explain what each employee's role is within the team and how that funnels into team goals. Ask the employees and get their opinions on what they can deliver and what they might find challenging. Explain what other support is available to help them deliver. - [Rittu Sinha, The Balanced Bandwagon](#)

10. Explain And Prioritize KPIs From Day One

The right way to set expectations with employees is to explain the key performance indicators in their interview and prioritize them beginning on day one. Evaluate their performance weekly with positive feedback and include constructive ways to improve. Never explode when things don't turn out the way you want; own your leadership flaws. - [Jacquelyn Van Tuyl, Jacquelyn Van Tuyl International](#)

11. Invite An Honest Conversation

While having an honest conversation can be frightening, it's also what prevents problems from building into untenable pressures. People tend to

avoid giving what seems like negative feedback; therefore, expectations can come across sharply or as vague instructions. Being up front with employees about everything, including what you don't know, as well ownership of responsibilities, builds both respect and trust. - [Jay Rai, www.jayrai.com](#)

12. Set The Tone With A Positive Frame Of Mind

As a leader, it is critical for you to set the tone when holding these discussions with your employees. First, ensure you are in a positive frame of mind as the leader and engage your team with a curious mindset. Second, there need to be commitments set after each meeting so that you can continue to move things forward with your team and they can continue to develop toward their full potential. - [Bryan Powell, Executive Coaching Space](#)

13. Trust People To Meet Expectations

Combine the expectations with a genuine belief that the person or team can and will accomplish what is expected, and that you, the leader, will always be available to help pave the way. Make sure they know they are not in it alone. - [John Lowe, Ty Boyd, Inc.](#)