

How often are you touching base with your people?

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There have been times in my career when I hadn’t seen or heard from my so-called leader for months. I remember I initially thought it was pretty cool that we didn’t have the big guy breathing down our throats, but as time went by, I began to wonder if the big guy cared much about us little guys.

Some leaders may not be the most effective leaders, but quite often they can still be good enough if they show they care for their people. There have been times when I’ve seen teams of people excel out of loyalty to the leader. People perform better if they are cared for--and a great way for a leader to show they care is for them to touch base with their people frequently.

Touching base means checking in and giving and getting feedback more often than once a year during annual formal evaluations, which we all know are typically an exercise in paperwork futility. People need the encouragement of being told they’re doing well on a regular basis. They also need to hear as soon as possible when they are not doing well. It can prevent a lot of problems with the organization, and it will improve the morale.

How often you check on people is determined by a number of factors:

The importance of the task. When something is critical to the success of the organization, you should touch base often.

The demands of the work. If the work is very demanding, the person performing it needs encouragement more often. They may also need questions answered or need help solving difficult problems. Occasionally, when the job is really tough, you should tell the person to take a break so that the demanding work doesn’t lead to burn-out.

The newness of the work. Some leaders have no problem tackling a new task, no matter how difficult it is from previous work. Others have great difficulty adapting. You should check often on the people who are less flexible or creative--they may be “stuck in mud” and you may not know it for several weeks.

The responsibility of the workers. When you know you can give a person a task and it will always get done, you may not have to check on that person until the task is almost complete. With less responsible people, though, you can’t afford to do that.

Your approach to checking on people should vary from person to person. For instance, rookies and veterans are treated differently for obvious reasons. But no matter how long people have been with you or your organization, there are some things you should always do:

Discuss feelings. Always give your people an opportunity to tell you how they feel. You also should tell them how you’re feeling. It clears the air and makes it possible to get down to business. (But always remember that

a real crisis demands action and not a discussion of feelings.)

Measure progress. Together, you and they should determine their progress. Ask questions to find out what you need to know. If people are hitting obstacles, removes the ones you can.

Give feedback. This is a critical part of the process. Always give them some kind of evaluation, but be sure to do your homework to make sure you’re accurate. One of the quickest ways to lose your people’s confidence in you is to “correct” them with invalid, incorrect, outdated, or illegal advice. Another aspect of giving feedback is giving constructive criticism when you can. This lets people know how they’re doing, corrects problems, encourages improvements, and speeds up the work.

Give encouragement. Whether the person is doing well or doing poorly, always give encouragement. You should encourage poor performers to do better, and encourage peak performers to stay the course. Always praise milestones. When people are dealing with personal issues, be patient and try to give them hope, encouragement, and time (if you can). Encouragement keeps people going.

As you move from day to day, week to week, always touch base with your people, and do it often! Be the leader who truly cares about your people. And always remember: *people don’t care how much you know until they know how much you care.*

~ The End ~