

# End-Result Expectations

Creating Clarity. Encouraging Collaboration. Getting Results.

Anna was exasperated. As CEO, she expected to spend her time on high-level strategic initiatives. Instead, she found herself in the middle of yet another meeting with Consuela, a Business Unit Manager, and Amin, the Director of Human Resources. Consuela was fuming. She was tired of putting up with Kathie's absences and wanted her out of the company. Amin would not support Consuela's decision to fire Kathie. She was tired of Amin and his HR Department blocking her efforts to run her unit efficiently. Amin tried to explain that he was just trying to save the company from another lawsuit.

Anna did not want to be an arbitrator. She wanted to run a business. She knew they wanted her to decide who was right. She silently wished they would figure it out on their own. She knew there was little chance of that happening. Worse than anything, she knew this meeting would take an hour out of her busy schedule.

## The Problem

This scenario occurs more often than most of us want to admit. It frequently degenerates into a he said, she said debate without a satisfactory conclusion. Each side has a story to tell. The more they tell it, the more they believe it. The more they believe it, the less likely they are to find a middle ground. The name for this concept is "exclusion of the middle." When one person is right and the person is wrong, it is difficult for either to stop considering the possibility that both are a little right and a little wrong.

The problem actually gets worse when the two parties seek help. Like Anna, the third party feels obligated to sort through the two conflicting stories. Each question, however, leads to an answer locks each of the debating partners further into their original position.

## The Solution

Fortunately, Anna can take control of this situation. She can save everyone some time. She can help Consuela run her business unit. She can help Amin prevent another lawsuit. She just has to define an end-result expectation and require Consuela and Amin to work toward it. Once she defines the end-result expectation, it is up to them to figure out how to achieve it. She transforms her role from arbitrator to facilitator. She enables Consuela and Amin to use the skill, knowledge, and ability they bring to job to solve the problem on their own.

It sounds easy. It is not. It requires practice and patience. It involves looking at the problem from a higher level.

## End-Result Expectations

An end-result expectation defines the solution to a problem. It requires the parties to evaluate their stories against a standard. Most importantly, it establishes a requirement. It is not a request or suggestion. It is the measure of success.

Listen in while Anna defines an end-result expectation for Consuela and Amin:

"Let me interrupt both of you. It is clear to me that both of you think you are right. It is possible that you are. Unfortunately, it does not help us run this business. Your job is to solve problems, not to create them. I am going to end this meeting by defining an end-result expectation. I expect the two of you to measure your position on Kathie against my end-result expectation.

First and foremost, people are an important part of this business. I expect managers and Human Resources to work together to manage people in a way that creates an opportunity for them to be successful within the parameters of our policies and standard practices. I expect you to base people decisions on an objective and fair analysis of each situation.

Now, I expect the two of you to review this situation in light of my expectation. I expect you to come back here tomorrow morning to share with me the action steps you will take to resolve this situation within those guidelines."

Anna's end-result expectation requires Consuela and Amin to take ownership of the problem and work together to resolve it.

## Elements

An end-result expectation includes three important elements. First, it rises above the details of a particular situation. It grows out of a global perspective of a business goal. Anna separated herself from the debate to refocus the discussion on moving the business forward.

Second, it establishes a standard for measuring success. Both Consuela and Amin must explain their

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plan to address Kathie's issues in terms that demonstrate that they will achieve Anna's expected end-result.

Third, an end-result expectation empowers those who are close to the problem to solve the problem. Anna could have easily taken on the problem and solved it for Consuela and Amin. They needed her help and guidance. They did not need her to do their job for them. They needed her to facilitate, not arbitrate. Notice, however, that Anna did not leave them to their own devices. She required them to come back to her with a plan. She may ultimately tweak or adjust their plan. That is her prerogative. In the end, however, she empowered each of them to analyze and address their problem against her end-result expectation.

## The End-Result Question

An end-result expectation enables a manager to measure the success of an effort by asking a straightforward question:

- How does this course of action produce the end-result expectation for this assignment?

The answer to the question moves the debate from justifying a position to solving a problem. It provides a future focus. It requires an objective analysis. It fosters collaboration.

An end-result expectation has one other advantage. It enables the manager to listen. Managers often jump into the discussion too quickly. When the manager starts talking, others stop participating. They quickly abdicate their role and responsibility. Instead of using their knowledge, skill, and ability to analyze and resolve an issue, they turn to their manager to tell them what to do. Too often, the manager's direction comes from an incomplete picture of the situation. In short, a manager is usually better off to ask a question than to make a statement or a snap judgment.

## Start with the End

In retrospect, it is unfortunate that Consuela and Amin got to the point of needing an arbitrator. Anna would be wise to invest some of her valuable time talking to her direct reports about the end-result expectations she has for each of them. Here are some examples of end-result expectations for typical workplace issues:

- **Teamwork:** I expect you to interact with your colleagues in a manner that enables them to

perceive that you are helping them achieve their goals.

- **Customer Service:** I expect you to create satisfied customers who report that you provide knowledgeable and timely services.
- **Projects:** I expect you to complete assignments by considering a full range of variables to provide a cost effective solution to a business issue.
- **Safety:** I expect you to plan to prevent accidents and injuries.
- **Attendance:** I expect you to be at your workstation ready to begin working at your scheduled time each day.

You can use your own words and style to create end-result expectations. Remember, however, that it is your job to define the expectation. An expectations is not a request. It is a requirement. It is what you will use to measure employee success.

## Conclusion

An end-result expectation is not a panacea. It does not solve every problem. It does prevent many of them. The secret to the success of an end-result expectation involves pulling back from the specifics of a situation to create a clear picture of what that situation looks like when it is working properly.

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