

# Ask the Leadership Coach



■ I manage a three person team responsible for setting up grant awards and issuing subcontracts. My team has been together for a couple of years now, and they don't want to make any decisions on their own. I end up reviewing all of their work, and telling them what to do, and it is starting to burn me out. Any advice?

A coach will typically help you find your own answers and approaches to leadership challenges rather than telling you what to do. That's what I'll do with your question and all subsequent questions. Plus, there is just a bit of context provided in your question, as in most questions. You shouldn't take advice from anyone who only knows as much about your challenge as you described above! Too many pieces and facts missing. It is always this way: I often feel when meeting a new client that I am starting to read a thirty chapter novel starting with chapter eight, or three, or twenty-nine. The fun part is catching up with the rest of the book!

The heart, core belief of coaching, is that the person who comes forth with a need or challenge, as you have done, has the knowledge and skill to solve their own problems! (Let's call the "person" the "client" now and in future columns.) This is different from consulting, where someone is hired to recommend a solution to a problem. What a coach brings is curiosity, insights, intuition and a belief that their client is up to their challenges. A coach helps their client discover solutions by supporting and challenging the client's thinking, encouraging the client to draw upon emotions and their physical self to help identify paths and opportunities, and fears. A coach helps the client be accountable for their actions and growth.

With all of that as preamble, let me tell you from your brief question what I am curious about: If I asked you what you would see as a successful outcome for you and your team, what would you say? What facts or situation is prompting your question now? If I take your assumption as truth (we all have our own versions of the truth!), as leader of this team, how willing are you to delegate decision making? I would be asking you "what else is going on" regarding team communications, performance plans, absenteeism? I would ask you to describe how you became a team leader, and what you are enjoying and finding challenging, and why. If I were to ask one of your team members how they feel about their work, especially how engaged are they in the work, I wonder what they would tell me? I also am wondering about you, and how clearly have you stated to your team what you want

them to do, and what decisions you want them to make? In other words, I would ask you to reflect.

When people resist taking on their own work and making decisions — assuming the expectations of their work have been made clear — the reasons may be that they are fearful of something bad happening if they take initiative. You might first talk to yourself, and reflect on this statement awhile, write down your thoughts. Later in the week or following week, when calm and ready, consider inviting your team to comment: "May I make a request? I feel a need to have a discussion and I am here to listen (mean that when you say it). I am noticing that I am reviewing all of your work and I feel like I am making all the decisions. This is not working for me. I am wondering if it is working for you. Help me understand what you are thinking and feeling."

I have a word going through my head that won't go away. I could be entirely wrong, so disregard this if it doesn't ring true to you. The word is perfection. I am wondering if you may be seeking perfection from your team, at some level. Perfection is not a bad word or a bad thing. If it veers off from a healthy search for excellence, then it can derail a team. Reason: no one knows what is good enough. Victories aren't celebrated. People can only do wrong. People act and behave out of worry that they won't please, rather than being autonomous and taking charge of their lives...in this context, their inboxes and functions. Ask yourself: if someone on your team took action, made a decision, and made a mistake how would you respond? What would others say if I asked them? Anyway, by introducing "perfection" to this discussion, I am making a huge leap and assumption. Bottom line: Use the opportunity you have provided yourself, with your question, to forge a closer connection and compassion for your team.



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