

Enabling an employee to reach his or her potential requires commitment and discipline. Many leaders struggle with completing annual evaluations, let alone training subordinates on new skills, coaching them to proficiency and supporting them through ongoing feedback and validation.

However, in my own journey and that of those I have trained & coached, the greatest challenge comes with confronting and effectively dealing with employees who underperform. The tendency is to either hope matters improve or to actively demonstrate compassion in order to encourage improvement. I, and others I have worked with, grind for months on end on questions like: “What else should I do?” “What did I fail to do?” “What did I do wrong?” “Should I talk to him/her?” “When will it turn around?” Spinning on these questions rather than confronting the poor performance didn’t work for me and wasn’t working for others.

The question of when and how to manage underperformance was consistently the leading question of my students and those I was coaching. So, I set out on a quest to find answers and to develop tools to help others with these questions.

The Two Types of Problems

Ken defines two types of problems that supervisors face in developing employees: Can’t Do vs. Won’t Do problems. Can’t Do problems are solved through effective action by the leader. Actions include goal setting, coaching, mentoring and supporting good results to build confidence. Can’t Do problems are the responsibility of the leader.

Won’t Do problems can only be solved by the employee, who must first take ownership of the problem. In Won’t Do problems, the employee has the direction, skills and confidence needed but is choosing to not perform. Once a Won’t Do problem is owned by the employee, the leader can assist, but the shift in ownership must come first.

This book is intended as a guide to help you diagnose whether you are experiencing a Can’t Do or Won’t Do problem, and then develop an action plan to handle it. It is intended to break the cycle of needlessly

blaming yourself for shortcomings as a leader in instances where the shortcomings are those of the employee and are his/her responsibility to address.

In addition, I seek to improve your performance as a supervisor in those instances where the employee's performance is going fine, but there remains unrealized potential. This is accomplished by raising the quality, specificity and value of performance conversations between supervisor and subordinate. Those conversations will be covered in depth throughout the book.

What I hope to offer supervisors with this book is **a)** a means by which you can discover the specifics as to how you can better contribute to optimum performance of your direct reports, and **b)** to put an end to the agony over what to do with subordinate underperformance. It is a guide on how to spot the source of the underperformance, gain clarity on what you vs. your subordinate may be responsible for and to take effective action early on.

The book is organized around a set of diagnostic questions that I refer to as the "7 Questions." Several of the questions I attribute to Ken Blanchard's teachings. I have added a few questions from my own journey as well. I devote a chapter to each question and attempt to illuminate its importance through a true story. The names in the stories have been changed to protect the victims of my own failures as each lesson and the question arising from it are sourced in a failure from my leadership journey or observing the successes of other leaders.

How to Use This Book

I would suggest that you read through the book in its entirety to become familiar with the overall approach, including how to introduce the conversation around the 7 Questions and when to use them.

Prior to having an initial conversation with one of your employees, think through why you are using the tool, how you are going to introduce the conversation and the 7 Questions themselves. Look over Chapter 6 on "The Underlying Principle of Fairness" to determine whether you