

## THE LEADERSHIP TOOLBOX

Welcome to the Leadership Toolbox – a reference focused on enhancing professional success. This is an on-going Bulletin designed to provide you with practical and useful tools, techniques and tips that you can immediately implement to increase your effectiveness. Research indicates that many employees believe their employers are not treating them fairly. In this bulletin, we will try and dissect what exactly fair treatment is and how each of us can implement techniques or behaviors to help promote a more fair, productive and effective work environment.

### COMPETENCY: FAIRNESS

**Definition:** At first glance, treating others fairly seems like an easy skill to implement. Be nice, be open, and be consistent. In short, be fair. Yet in truth, this is a very difficult skill to master. Why? Because treating people fairly means we need to be aware of our own subjective biases, preferences, and judgments as each of these alters the way we perceive what fairness is as well as how others should be treated. Just ask five people in your work area *what would be the fair thing to do* about a situation or employee and often you will likely hear five different responses. Treating people fairly is not as easy as it seems.



If you had a referee following you around calling your treatment of others fair vs. unfair, would you be proud or uncomfortable at the end of the day?

Leaders have tried to objectify this issue by creating performance management programs that outline what effective performance is and this type of action can assist in facilitating fair treatment. Organizations have developed strategic profiles listing organizational values which often list *treating others fairly* as a

core value to uphold. Yet rarely is the definition of what this means as far as daily behavior listed. Our definition of fairness is treating each employee appropriately, and individually, based on the circumstances and contribution of that employee. Fairness requires the application of *good* judgment which again, involves subjective definitions of what *good* means. Treating people fairly is not always easy, even with the best of intentions.

### BENEFITS OF DEMONSTRATING THIS COMPETENCY EFFECTIVELY

A large part of an employee's motivation to perform will be based on his/her perspective of fair treatment with the company and more importantly, with his/her supervisor. In many ways, fairness is about justice. And interpreting what is just, what is fair is in the eye of the beholder. Employees know when they are being treated fairly. By fostering a culture of fairness, any organization will improve the morale of its' employees as well as improve employee productivity. Organizations that treat their employees fairly are happy and productive.

### CONSEQUENCES OF NOT DEMONSTRATING THIS COMPETENCY EFFECTIVELY

What are the consequences for not treating people fairly? Low morale, low productivity, low engagement, high turnover, high costs for hiring and training, increased errors, increased injury, increased lawsuits, decreased profits, etc. Do we need to say more? Even though this is a tough competency to master, working on it can really make a difference in the eyes of employees, leaders and also, on the bottom line. Few things are more demoralizing to the culture of an organization than seeing certain people not being treated fairly. Too often we see good performance being punished and poor performance being rewarded. Not treating employees fairly shows up as a mayor dissatisfier in employee satisfaction surveys. There is something insidious that festers when employees see injustice in the workplace.

### IMPLEMENTATION:

#### Tip: Establish Clear Performance Targets And Rewards

Write down your expectations and also voice them to employees. Differentiate the levels of performance. What does good performance look like vs. exceptional performance? What are five indicators that you look for to differentiate performance at each level? Write these *success indicators* down and share them with employees.

Set your employees up for success by letting them know clear performance expectations. After you are done sharing the expectations in both a written and verbal form, ask employees how they would demonstrate to you that they were meeting those expectations. Perhaps think about drafting a Performance Management Toolkit that clearly identifies what differentiates performance levels for all positions so that all supervisors or leaders can be more consistent in their performance management and appraisal.

**Tip: Treat Employees Like Adults**

Most employees want to be treated as unique, mature individuals. They want to know that they are recognized as individual human beings and that if needed, special exceptions will be made to accommodate their particular circumstances. They want to be heard and they want to be provided with the tools and information needed to accomplish their responsibilities. From managers and supervisors, we often hear statements such as: *I wish my employees would act like adults vs. children*. Sometimes we even hear these types of comments from employees speaking of their supervisors. Stepping back, often children act up when they are craving attention. Give them some *appropriate* attention and they will likely begin acting more like adults. Yet how do we treat individuals like adults? How should adults be treated? The answer lies within a subjective judgment at best. Ask questions and listen to others. Find out what they need or desire to get their jobs done effectively. When we treat someone like an adult, we assume they can handle a higher level of responsibility as well as know what is right and what is wrong. Simply, stop assuming. This also means after sharing clear performance expectations, letting them be responsible and holding them accountable for their performance.

**Tip: Facilitate Honest Discussions**

An important component of the perception of fairness is open and honest communication or the ability for all involved to exchange interactive viewpoints on a topic. It's demonstrating a balance of listening and speaking. It means talking about the difficult topics when needed along with the easy ones. For more difficult or controversial topics, we recommend that a *Code of Conduct* be developed and agreed to which outlines behavior during more difficult or controversial discussions. Also, ensuring conversations occur at the right time and place for all involved can be a key difference in the perception of being treated fairly.

If someone complains to you that you've demonstrated unfair behavior, listen because that individual may have a point. Ask what that individual would consider to be fair treatment, and engage in a dialogue that gets all perspectives on the table. Listen for an opportunity to learn rather than to defend. Be willing to compromise and come to a mutual agreement. *Walk the talk* you want to see in others.

**Tip: Share Information Openly**

When people are informed or feel informed, they are less likely to believe you are holding information with negative motives. When people don't know what is about to happen or why a change is occurring, they are likely to imagine the worst and share their perspectives with others. The remedy, share, share, share. Whether problems, goals, successes, or possibilities, let employees know what is ahead of them, the department and the organization. Get everyone together on a consistent basis and talk about the good and the not so good. Talk about opportunities and roadblocks. Perhaps solicit their ideas. Get them engaged and they will believe they are being treated fairly and with respect. There will likely be less complaints and more suggestions for maintaining good things and preventing bad things from happening.

**Tip: Be Consistent In Your Behavior**

Don't change your tune with every change of mood, and don't maintain different standards for different people, or different groups, without reasons everyone feels good about. This is part of the subjective area of this competency. Know yourself and know how you modify your style based on your mood. Be aware of your moods and understand how others perceive your presence when experiencing different a different frame of mind. For example, how do you treat employee situations when feeling happy vs. anxious vs. frustrated? Respond vs. react. Also, consistently follow through on promises as doing so builds trust, which is directly linked with the perception of fairness. Don't ignore the hard stuff. Promise what you can deliver and nothing more.

**Tip: Treat Others Based On Overall Performance And Contribution**

Being fair in our society is often interpreted as providing equal opportunity for all. Yet treating people consistently without room for individuality often leads to failed relationships. Effective, fair treatment involves studying the people you work with and withholding judgments about them. It means taking the time to observe and collect observations and evidence on how they behave and perform. Consider what drives them and motivates them to do the things they do. Use this to help understand how to relate to them and treat them fairly. Snap decisions about others are often the wrong decision. Treating everyone the same is also often very ineffective. Reward for engaged performance or merit and correct others' performance when needed.

**Tip: Have A Job Description For Every Position**

Ensure your people have up to date, detailed job descriptions and don't leave out any responsibilities (technical or professional skills). Make sure that everyone performing the same job or responsibility has a similar job description and all are held accountable for those responsibilities in a similar manner (same success indicators and/or performance differentiators). Job descriptions are also used to help determine compensation levels. The idea is that the higher level of responsibility, education, complexity or problem solving skills needed to accomplish the job successfully, the higher the pay grade. How updated or detailed are position descriptions in your organization? Does your position description really represent the responsibilities you are held accountable for?

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**QUOTES ON FAIRNESS:**

Though force can protect in emergency, only justice, fairness, consideration and cooperation can finally lead men to the dawn of eternal peace. *Dwight D. Eisenhower*

Live so that when your children think of fairness, they think of you. *H. Jackson Brown Jr.*

Fairness is an individual's ability to rise above prejudices. *Wes Fessler*

It is not fair to ask of others what you are unwilling to do yourself. *Eleanor Roosevelt*

Life is not fair, get used to it. *Bill Gates*

I know the world isn't fair, but why isn't it ever unfair in my favor? *Bill Watterson*

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**TO RECEIVE PAST BULLETINS...**

If you are interested in reviewing past Toolbox Bulletins, visit:

<http://www.lynn-and-associates.com/Bulletins.html>



If you are in interested in talking with Lisa or Jim on how to implement any of the tips, tools or skills within this or other bulletins, please feel free to contact us anytime!

**Jim Lynn:** jim@lynnconst@aol.com or 952-474-2193

**Lisa Lynn:** lisa@lynn-and-associates.com or 612-619-6315

We hope the information presented in this bulletin has been practical and helpful. Please let us know what you think and how it could be improved or if there is a topic you would like us to talk about in an upcoming newsletter. Make it a productive day!

The Lynn & Associates Team