Too Much Work, Not Enough People –
Setting expectations and boundaries in the work place

Have you ever asked yourself "If only I had a second pair of hands, I could...?" In today's work environment, managers are asked to take on more responsibility with less support. Managing this responsibility can be stressful. Successful managers, however, are able to set expectations and manage boundaries to not just keep their own stress levels in check but, more importantly, to satisfy both their boss's and organizations' needs.

So what does it mean to set expectations and manage boundaries? For many busy managers, setting expectations means having clarity around what tasks or objectives they can accomplish in a given time period. Managing boundaries means holding true to that clarity and positively influencing those external forces that try to manipulate your decision making process.

The first challenge most managers face is in setting realistic expectations. Too many times we let outside forces dictate what we can accomplish. Whether it is an upcoming promotion or the fear of being cut from the team, we often think about what others need and not what we need to succeed. Successful managers track what tasks they are working on and the time it takes to complete these tasks. They also take into account those things that provide them with work/life balance. The choice is up to you: either begin managing your own expectations or allow others to set them for you…leaving little room for important things like vacations, hobbies, family gatherings or simply quiet time in your favorite place.

Managers know that setting realistic expectations is a major factor to their success but very few ever figure out how to hold true to the boundaries which allow for the timely execution of a task. If you think about it, most successful managers "climb the ladder" because of their ability to manage projects and delegate responsibility. This ability to manage and delegate is enhanced when successful managers share their expectations and boundaries with others.

Sharing allows them to validate their process and create awareness. The awareness created informs others about what exactly it will take to get a specific task accomplished. By creating this awareness, others naturally respect your boundaries and realize that when you set an expectation, it will be accomplished.

Successful managers, however, also make time and space for the things or people in their lives that allow them to achieve their success. This is the challenge that distinguishes average managers from successful managers. Successful managers take into account the "big picture." They realize that enjoying work is important to enjoying life.

Setting expectations and managing boundaries are skills that can be developed. To start, take an account of everything you are doing both personally and professionally. List these items in a calendar, on a sheet of paper or more formally on a spreadsheet. Second, assess how much time you have to complete these tasks. Make sure you give ample time to complete the task. Third, look at what you are trying to accomplish and make adjustments. Fourth, begin sharing with others your goals for specific tasks and gather their feedback. Do not GIVE feedback, just take it in. This will give perspective to those tasks you want to accomplish. Once you are clear about your expectations and know that they are realistic, begin setting your boundaries. Share your current work load with others before taking on additional responsibilities. Others can initially help you decide what tasks to prioritize and what tasks may not be as necessary, based on your goals.

As you begin to implement this process of setting expectations and managing boundaries you will find that your quality of work improves and the relationships around you improve as well.

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