

How Can I Boost Initiative In My Team?

Do you ever get asked for your advice, opinion or assistance? In fact, do you seem to spend most of your time responding to people's queries and telling them what they should be doing? And do you feel that you are repeatedly asked the same questions by the same people?

It's frustrating, isn't it? You have a job to do, a team to manage, results to achieve and deadlines to meet. You could do without these distractions because that's what they feel like. Why can't people just use their initiative and get on with the job?

Well, there may be a number of **reasons for people not using their initiative**:

- They genuinely believe they don't know the answer
- They need your reassurance
- They're scared to do the wrong thing for fear of the consequences
- They know you'll always tell them the answer
- It's easier to ask you rather than have to work it out for themselves

Ask yourself: "Am I happy with the current situation? Are we performing effectively as a team?" If the answer is "Yes", then continue what you're doing. However, I would suspect many of you would like to free up some time to concentrate on your real priorities rather than fire-fighting and regularly solving other people's problems for them.

Here are **my suggestions for getting people to take responsibility for themselves and show initiative**:

When asked for your advice, opinion or assistance, ask yourself:

- "Is it in my/their best interests to answer directly or would they benefit more if I were to encourage them to work it out for themselves with my support?"
- "How many times have I answered this question for them previously?" If they're still asking it then the direct approach obviously isn't working so stop telling and start asking.
- "How much are they actually being paid to do this role? Is it reasonable to expect them to work this out for themselves?"
- "Have they had any necessary training and are they indicating that they have put their learning into practice?"

I'm not advocating that you never give a straight answer. That would be infuriating. However, question how badly you want them to think for themselves. What's in it for you and them? If the benefit outweighs the current negatives then veer away from a directive approach towards a coaching style.

Also, **consider whether you're partly responsible** for the current situation:

- Do you actually like them being reliant on you and seeking your reassurance?
- Do you think it's your role as a manager to always share your knowledge and experience?

- Do you think it would weaken your position and diminish the respect people have for you if you change your approach?
- Do you believe you know best and there's only one way to deal with situations? (Your way).
- How receptive are you to the idea that people are generally capable of doing a good job and able to think of ideas and solutions when given some encouragement?

As John Whitmore says in his book, *Coaching for Performance*, "To use coaching successfully, we have to adopt a far more optimistic view than usual of the dormant capability of people, all people".

Expect more from people. Spend an extra few minutes establishing what it is they are trying to achieve. Find out what they've tried so far. Encourage them to think of other possible solutions, and get them to decide how best they'll tackle it. Then let them get on with it and follow up their progress in due course.

That bit of extra time spent upfront will pay big dividends later when you've got people who get into the habit of thinking for themselves, doing a quality job, and feeling satisfied with what they've achieved.

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ABOUT THE AUTHOR:

Jennifer Hampson is a certified coach, inspirational trainer, and speaker. She helps organisations create a coaching culture with wide-ranging impact on all who work there. Her online newsletters for HR Managers, Learning & Development Managers and Line Managers is crammed with useful tips, strategies and 'How to...?' Guides, to keep you informed, enlightened and inspired about how you can use coaching to make a real difference to YOU and YOUR ORGANISATION. Sign up for it now at <http://www.creatingacoachingculture.co.uk>