How to nag without nagging

No one likes having to nag their employees. You may feel like a micromanaging pest, and your staffers may resent being treated like wayward kids.

But if you have justifiable reasons to doubt whether your instructions will be followed, then silently hoping your employees follow through isn't much of a strategy. You'll worry yourself sick. Try these non-pushy ways to nag:

Expect compliance. Even if you're concerned that someone won't do what you've asked, maintain a pleasant, upbeat demeanor when checking in with them. Don't fret or grimace when you ask for a progress report ("How's it going on that project?"). Your tone should reinforce your expectation that the assignment is in capable hands and you're confident it'll get done.

"My employees rise to a higher level of dependability if I let them know that I trust them to deliver," says a product manager for a consumer goods company. "One could call it nagging. But I'm just rallying them to turn in great work on time or give me that extra effort."

Send team messages. If you've delegated key tasks to a group, follow up with e-mail. Remind everyone of what needs to happen and include a timetable. Toss in a few new developments to give the note some timeliness. That way, individuals won't feel nagged as much as reminded that you care about the outcome of their work.

Ask for buy-in. After assigning a job, engage the employee in a discussion. Ask: Are you comfortable with this deadline?, Do you have any doubts about getting this done?, Would you prefer that I check in with you every few days or leave you alone?