

Motivate staffers by 'backcasting'



Typically, leaders who want to motivate staffers to enhance their performance start by saying, “Let’s set goals for you to push yourself to improve.” That’s not necessarily a good idea.

When you assess the current situation and then analyze historical data to determine what goals or action steps people should take, tensions can flare. Employees can defend why they’ve been doing what they do—and why they deserve more credit for their efforts.

Indeed, they may chafe at having to pursue lofty goals when they feel they already excel at their job despite myriad obstacles.

To avoid such conflict, motivate people by “backcasting.” That means starting with the future state you want to create and then working backward from that vision to the present situation. This involves asking, “If we want to attain this goal, how can we get there?”

To backcast effectively, gather your team and challenge them to visualize a better future. What’s going right? What opportunities did they pursue? What risks paid off?

Then guide them to identify different attitudes and approaches they need to adopt to turn the vision into reality. Give them the freedom to shove aside constraints, such as tight budgets and “we’ve never done it that way” excuses, so that they can develop a plan to advance toward the goal.

In terms of time frame, spur your employees to look as far out as five or more years. They’ll be more motivated to mobilize to achieve bold objectives if they can rethink products, strategy and technology to achieve an exciting vision of a better future.

— Adapted from “[To Generate Successful Strategic Improvements, Start by ‘Backcasting.’](#)” Ray Attiyah, [www.chiefexecutive.net](#).