



Professional Development

November/December 2008

Tips for Developing People: Setting Deadlines

Setting deadlines is a common and necessary activity for managers. Getting results through other people inevitably means that you need to know the people you are working with and understand the work that needs to be done. Every business deals with deadlines in some form. Some are self-imposed and others are set to meet the needs of internal departments or external clients.

Attitudes toward deadlines can vary enormously among organizations. In some companies an established deadline is revered and cannot be changed. In other companies, deadlines are flexible and can be revised as needed. Some companies set impossible deadlines as a means of distinguishing top performers, while other companies take existing commitments and priorities into account to ensure obtainable deadlines are set.

There is much for managers to learn about setting deadlines. Each deadline set can be a learning opportunity. Some examples of lessons learned include the following:

- Be assertive: set realistic deadlines + refuse to commit to unrealistic deadlines
- Be respectful: give adequate notice and detail on what is expected
- Be respectful: agree on deadlines, take existing workloads into consideration
- Be smart: ensure employees have the skills + resources to meet deadlines
- Be proactive: request regular feedback on long or large deadlines
- Be communicative: in the event of deadline changes, communicate ASAP
- Be communicative: ask questions to ensure deadlines are understood
- Be aware: tight deadlines can motivate or demotivate
- Be aware: long deadlines can lead to procrastination
- Be flexible: build in margins for error and the unexpected
- Be appreciative: recognize employees that meet deadlines or deliver early

Deadlines are an important part of management's responsibility for planning, as they serve to keep projects and processes on track. Deadlines prioritize tasks by establishing a hierarchy of importance. Deadlines provide motivation and structure to the jobs of subordinates which facilitates effective and efficient workplace operations.

Excerpts of this article obtained from <http://www.prioritymanagement.com/>.