

25 Finding the Lever

Jeanette was a sales supervisor. She had a competent team, and outstanding among them was Julie. Julie was a superb sales person, and always headed the ‘targets achieved’ list, month after month.

There was one major problem though: Julie’s timekeeping. Though there was a clear office policy on punctuality, Julie was more often than not late – sometimes by up to half an hour.



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Jeanette had spoken to Julie about this on several occasions. On each occasion Julie's timekeeping improved in the short term, but deteriorated over the longer term.

Jeanette was stuck. She did not want to support Julie's lateness, and it set a bad example for the rest of the team, who were also frustrated at Julie's timekeeping. Equally, though, Jeanette did not want to lose her most successful sales person.

When Jeanette discussed this with me, I asked if Julie had other interests, motives or drivers. The company had a Management Development Scheme, and Jeanette mentioned that Julie was keen to progress within the company, and wanted to join the Scheme. But to do so, she needed her supervisor's nomination.

I suggested that this might be a lever, something for Jeanette to trade against the poor timekeeping.

Jeanette saw immediately what I was getting at, and decided to try it out.

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I next saw Jeanette 3 months later, and asked if she had had a conversation with Julie, and what the result had been.

“It was great”, said Jeanette. “I sat down privately with Julie, and raised her timekeeping again, but this time added something. I said I knew she wanted to be recommended for the MD Scheme, and that I was happy to do so, apart from the problem of timekeeping. I could not, in good faith, recommend to the company someone for a management role who was such a poor timekeeper, and would set a poor example to her staff. If of course, the timekeeping issue could be

solved, I'd be happy to recommend her. Julie's timekeeping has been spot on ever since."

People get into habits – good and bad – and habits are difficult to change.

To make that change, people often need a motivator, or incentive – a carrot.

The key point here, though is that until our conversation, Jeanette had not seen the potential of

using Julie's driver (for career development) as something to trade to gain improvement in time keeping. Jeanette had seen both issues as important, but as separate.

Sometimes we are too close to situations, and cannot see the wood for the trees. Talking through the problem with someone who has a fresh, detached perspective, might provide an insight or idea that you'd missed.

“If history were taught in the form of stories, it would never be forgotten” (R. Kipling)

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