

Pushing Buttons

Leadership Lessons From A Key Fob

By Kendall C. Wright, President of Entelechy Training and Development, Inc.

It is often in the midst of a good laugh - at myself - that I find a noteworthy leadership nugget. That was the case recently when I found myself highly agitated that my key fob wasn't working. As I walked back to my car, after a very stressful meeting, I pulled my key fob from my pocket and expectantly listened for the familiar chirp of my car's alarm system. I pressed and pressed and pressed, but nothing happened. Not even the faintest of chirps. I wondered if I might need to walk closer or if the battery in the key fob was waning. After walking right up to my car and still nothing, I was furious. Only to discover I was pushing the wrong button.

Pushing the wrong buttons. Practically every leader can relate to working really hard to get an associate to be more engaged, productive, or motivated only to be frustrated by the lack of response. The answer is not in working harder, but in making sure you are pushing the correct button for the specific individual with whom you're working.

When leaders rely on or resort to mindlessly interacting with their associates, no one should be surprised or disappointed that nothing close to maximum, optimum, or peak performance is achieved. The right button is usually not something the leader stumbles upon, but instead, it is something the leader and the associate discover jointly.

The most effective leaders proactively engage their associates in ongoing conversation about the associates' drivers, motives, and aspirations. In other words, the leader and the associates invest both time and energy to identify those pertinent and powerful buttons. Learning what is important to the associates allows the leader to get things done efficiently and effectively. Such an investment reduces the likelihood of wasting time pushing the wrong buttons and expecting good things to happen.

Below are examples of questions to help both associates and leaders find the right buttons:

- o What is your preferred method of learning?
- o What is your preferred form of recognition?
- o What is your preferred interval for feedback?
- o What is your preferred style of coaching?

What is your preferred style of conflict resolution?

Imagine the power of leaders and associates knowing how to best work with one another. There is simply no substitute for this kind of alignment and collaboration.

The next time you use your key fob, let it be a reminder to invest in learning which buttons work best for your team members – and why.

Actualizing Leadership Lesson: To grab your key fob and indiscriminately press the buttons will more than likely result in a frustrating situation. The energy to press the correct button is no different from that of pressing the incorrect button, but the results are dramatically different. The same is true in attempting to increase the levels of engagement and contribution of individual contributors on your team. If you don't know what button to push, you can't get the results you're expecting. Proactively and persistently asking the right questions will reveal the right buttons.

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