Key Principles

Maintain or Enhance Self-Esteem

People need to feel respected and have a sense of self-worth in order to be motivated, confident, innovative, and committed to their work.

When things haven’t gone as well as someone might have planned, you need to maintain that person’s self-esteem. To do this, you can:

- **Focus on facts.** Don’t say things like, “You never follow through.” Instead, give specific facts: “I received three complaints that you didn’t follow up on requests.”

- **Respect and support others.** Even when people aren’t performing their best, they need to feel your support and to know that they’re valued.

- **Clarify motives.** Don’t jump to conclusions. Keep others’ self-esteem in mind, and you’ll be more likely to ask, “What can you tell me about this error?” instead of, “Don’t you care about quality?”

**Examples**

“I understand that the technology changes in the system have caused you to miss a few due dates. However, because of your quick thinking and planning, you were able to keep the delays to a minimum.”

“I agree that you’re meeting your production numbers, and that’s very important to the bottom line. It’s also important to make sure the data is reported on time so that other departments can act on the information. How can we make sure that the data is reported on time?”

When someone has done a good job, succeeded at a task, or made a contribution, you want to enhance that person’s self-esteem. Some ways to do that are to:

- **Acknowledge good thinking and ideas.** Demonstrations of appreciation encourage people to think and contribute, and they support innovation and intellectual risk taking.

- **Recognize accomplishments.** People need to hear specifically what they’ve done to contribute to the team’s or organization’s success. This encourages them to sustain or exceed expectations.

- **Express and show confidence.** Voicing your trust and then calling on people to show what they can do boosts their confidence and their feelings of self-worth.

- **Be specific and sincere.** When you describe in detail what people do well and why it’s effective, they know exactly what you’re recognizing.

**Examples**

“Taking the initiative to record the group’s concerns during our meeting today helped us stay on track. I really appreciate your efforts.”

“Our success in exceeding our goal is because of all your efforts to pull together and stay focused on our target. Great job, everyone. Thanks!”
As a leader, you encounter people’s feelings of success, failure, pride, and frustration frequently—perhaps daily. When someone in your group expresses emotion, whether verbally or nonverbally, you can listen and respond with empathy to let that person know that you understand. Use this Key Principle to:

- **Respond to both facts and feelings.** It’s important to reflect both the facts of the situation and the underlying feelings so people know they’ve really been heard.

- **Defuse negative emotions.** Strong emotions, like anger, frustration, or reluctance, can get in the way of achieving the purpose of the discussion. Identify and address these feelings to show people you’ve heard them, yet keep the discussion moving forward.

- **Empathize with positive feelings too.** Empathy is understanding how someone is feeling. You can empathize with someone’s feelings without agreeing with them.

**Examples**

“It’s obvious that these last-minute changes (fact) have caused a lot of aggravation (feeling) for you and the team.”

“The look on your face says congratulations are in order. You must be pleased (feeling) with the results of the customer satisfaction survey (fact).”

To get the most from people in your group, you need to access their ideas and opinions. When you ask for help and encourage involvement, you show people that you value their input and abilities. Remember to:

- **Make involvement your first choice.** Instead of offering your suggestions first, be a catalyst—turn telling into seeking.

- **Unleash everyone’s ideas with questions.** Ask open-ended questions, which usually begin with what, how, which, why, or who.

- **Encourage responsibility through involvement.** Catalysts involve people in thinking through issues and solutions and in executing the plan.

**Examples**

“Before we get too far along in the process, I wanted to take some time to ask you how you think the setup for the operation is progressing. I’d also like to hear your thoughts and opinions about the setup and anything else you might have observed.”

“Now that we’ve all had a chance to read the customer feedback on our service operation, I wanted to get together to discuss your thoughts on the feedback and what recommendations you might have to remedy the issues.”
Share Thoughts, Feelings, and Rationale
(to build trust)

People work best for leaders they trust. A proven way to build trust is to disclose thoughts, feelings, and rationale that people would otherwise be unaware of. When sharing, remember to:

- **Disclose feelings and insights appropriately.** Sharing doesn’t mean disclosing everything in every situation. Be sure what you’re sharing is relevant to the situation.

- **Offer the “whys” behind a decision, idea, or change.** The rationale behind a move can provide insights to those who are affected by it. When people know why, they operate on more than just assumptions.

- **Make sure your ideas, opinions, and experiences supplement those of others.** Provide insights, but don’t dominate the discussion.

**Examples**

(Sharing thoughts) “It looks like we are off to a great start with this project. I’m thinking that we might want to have a conference call with the other reps to make sure that we all have a common understanding of what this project entails.”

(Sharing feelings) “I know this is a radical change and we’re all struggling with how it will affect our customers. Frankly, I’m concerned about that too. But I have to tell you I think this change is necessary because . . .”

(Sharing feelings) “I can sense that you are feeling uneasy about the upcoming presentation. I felt intimidated the first time I presented to this group too. Would it help if we took some time to review your presentation now?”

(Sharing rationale) “Let me give you some details on what started this process and why our group needs to have a key role in it.”
Nothing can deflate people’s confidence faster than telling them they’re responsible for something, and then doing it yourself. Conversely, when you provide support without removing responsibility, you build people’s sense of ownership of the task or assignment as well as the confidence that they can accomplish it. When you use this Key Principle, remember to:

- **Help others think and do.** Provide your support in two ways: Help others think of ideas, alternatives, and solutions, then support them so that they can execute the plan.

- **Be realistic about what you can do and keep your commitments.** Remember that you don’t have to do it all, but be sure to do whatever you agree to.

- **Resist the temptation to take over—keep responsibility where it belongs.** Leaders tend to be action oriented and task driven, so keeping responsibility where it belongs can take resolve, even courage. You might have to overcome the protests of a team member who is reluctant to stretch into new areas or even brave objections from a key manager about your decision to support others rather than take over.

**Examples**

“I know this procedure is unfamiliar to you. I’d be happy to coach you through the process if you think that would be helpful.”

“Yes, I could make the call and explain the situation about the delay in the delivery date, but you have been the key contact for the project, and frankly, I think the client would be expecting to hear about this from you. Would it help if we talked about how you might present the news to them?”
Interaction Guidelines

OPEN

In the OPEN step you ensure that the discussion has a clear purpose and that everyone understands the importance of accomplishing it.

- Always state purpose and importance clearly in the discussion opening.
  - If you initiate the discussion, explain what you would like to accomplish and why.
  - If someone else is leading the discussion, ask questions if necessary to pinpoint the purpose and importance.
- Cite how accomplishing the purpose would benefit others in the discussion.
- Ask if there are any related topics to discuss.

Examples

“The purpose of our meeting today is to come up with a way to modify the existing scheduling process in order to divide the new tasks evenly among the team.”

“I wanted to take some time to talk with you about the upcoming sales campaign and about how it’s going to affect your team.”

CLARIFY

There are two types of information to seek and share in this step: facts and figures and issues and concerns. Both are essential to building a complete picture of the situation.

- Facts and figures are the basic data and background information that people need to understand the situation and make informed decisions.
- Exploring issues and concerns provides insight into potential barriers to achieving your purpose. It also helps reveal people’s feelings about the situation, which is valid, important information to gather.

Examples

“I think we’re all in agreement that this is going to be a difficult task. Before we get started I’d like each of us to express our concerns and questions to make sure that we don’t overlook anything.”

“I’d like to get an idea of the projects your team is working on now to see how we’re going to incorporate the new campaign initiatives. Can you describe your team’s current workload as well as the time frames and deadlines they’re working with?”
DEVELOP

When developing ideas, it’s important to ask questions and include others in the process. Most likely, you’ll have ideas about what to do, and you should share them. However, you should put equal emphasis on seeking others’ ideas. Involving people in thinking about alternative approaches can:

- Spark their creative energy.
- Result in more and better ideas than you alone could generate.
- Build commitment to turning ideas into action.

Examples

“We know that we want to increase the sales projections by 15 percent, so the question is: How are we going to make it happen? Because you all have been on the team for a while, I’d like to hear your ideas on how we can accomplish this.”

“I like your idea for reducing maintenance costs. What if we took that idea a step further and expanded it to other areas? What might be the impact on overall operating expenses?”

“I can see we have a challenge facing us with time. What are your thoughts on how we can move some of these projects along? What resources will we need?”

AGREE

It’s important that you and the people involved agree on a plan for following through on the ideas that were developed and for supporting those who will take action. During this step:

- Specify what will be done, who will do it, and by when.
- Agree on any follow-up actions needed to track progress in carrying out the plan.
- Be sure to agree on needed resources or support.

Examples

“So, are we in agreement that John will talk with the scheduling team about our new deadline and that Rob will talk with his team about the possibility of scheduling conference calls rather than relying on outside meetings?”

“To summarize, we’ve agreed to change the testing time and will meet this Monday to make final revisions. Marty is going to advise the operations group of our progress and invite them to send a rep to the Monday meeting. Have I missed anything?”
CLOSE

This is the final chance to make sure that everyone is clear on agreements and next steps and committed to following through. Closing sensitive or complex discussions could involve a detailed summary of actions and agreements as well as a check on the person’s or team’s commitment to carrying them out. More often, the CLOSE step can be a brief statement on the general plan and a quick check on people’s confidence in following through.

Examples

“I think we have a good plan here. I have full confidence that you’ll be able to make the new assignments happen and still have success with the existing workload. Is everyone comfortable with our approach?”

“Thanks, everybody. I know this was hard work, but I think the changes we’re suggesting will enable us to get the testing process back on schedule.”
Process Skills

Using the process skills **check for understanding** and **make procedural suggestions** helps ensure that each person understands what has been discussed and keeps the discussion moving forward.

**Check for Understanding**

You might need to check for understanding if something is unclear to you or others about any important part of the discussion, such as information, decisions, ideas, or agreements. Checking for understanding:

- Confirms that everyone has the same understanding.
- Uncovers discrepancies that can be cleared up early.

**Examples**

“*What I think I’m hearing is a concern about the delivery date we agreed on. Do you want to talk more about that before we move on?*”

“*Before we continue, would someone like to summarize what we’ve agreed to so far, to make sure we all have the same understanding?*”

**Make Procedural Suggestions**

A procedural suggestion is a recommendation of how the discussion might be organized or conducted. It also helps keep the discussion on track.

**Examples**

“*I know you want to discuss the other issues affecting our deadline, but our first priority is to establish the tasks and individuals responsible. Can we discuss these first, and then get back to your issues?*”

“*We have several suggestions on the table. Would it help if we went around the room and gave each person two minutes to voice his or her opinion on which option we should choose and why?*”