

The Next Step Is a Leap

Giving associates assignments that challenge them to stretch their skills is important to their professional development, but the process requires helping them build their confidence.

This was discovered by Roger Chevalier during his career as a Coast Guard officer, and he writes about it in the book, *A Manager's Guide to Improving Workplace Performance*.

Chevalier led a training unit that delivered leadership and management courses. Originally, the courses were offered to senior enlisted people, but then were extended to junior officers as well. The day before the first officers' class began, one of the enlisted instructors sent word that he didn't want to teach, although he had taught the course successfully until then.

In talking to the instructor, Chevalier learned he was worried that the young college-educated officers would know more than he did and he would embarrass himself. Feeling under-qualified and unconfident, the instructor refused to teach the course.

Naturally, this blatant refusal drove Chevalier's temperature up a few degrees. He was about to order the instructor to teach the course; after all, Chevalier was the officer and manager, and he had the power. However, because of his respect for the instructor's skills and accomplishments – as well as his common sense – Chevalier held back.

Instead of attacking or discounting the instructor's fears, Chevalier focused on rebuilding his self-confidence. For example, college graduates though they were, the junior officers were not experts on leadership and management as the instructor was. Chevalier also concentrated on the instructor's excellent teaching reviews, and pointed out that if he didn't teach the course, Chevalier himself would have to – and he wasn't as prepared as the instructor.

Partially convinced, the instructor agreed to teach the class if Chevalier would attend the class as his backup. Chevalier was willing to do this, and confident his help wouldn't be needed. That turned out to be true, and the instructor met the new challenge.

What is true in the Coast Guard works in health care, too. As is the case with many of our associates hampered by self-doubt, the next level in their career growth is made possible by offering him or her a realistic view of the challenge, renewed self-confidence, and a reasonable level of support.



– Beecher Hunter