WHY’S AND WHAT’S

Focus: Leadership

Time: 10 minutes

Objectives:

1. Understand the importance of communication to subordinates
2. Learn how to communicate better in three different challenging situations

Materials needed:

- None

Introduction:

It is important to understand that as a leader you are responsible for ensuring that the best decisions are made, and that you will not always be the person who initiates those decisions. Employees need to know the reasons behind what they are asked to do. Therefore, it is imperative that leaders regularly communicate policy and procedure, explaining not only what has to be done, but sharing the “why” as well. When leaders direct their employees to action without explaining why they are in effect saying, “Do it because I said so,” which while a common response to children, is a huge turn-off for adults.

Directions:

1. Discuss the following three scenarios:
   a. Leader A is equates providing explanation to employees as having to justify their requests, which diminishes their authority.
   b. Leader B does not believe that it is important whether or not the employees understand the reasons for instructions or actions, since it should not make any difference in the outcome.
   c. Leader C has encountered a situation whereby they themselves do not understand the reasons for a decision and action, and thus feel they should not communicate anything to their employees other than instructions to complete the action.

Discussion Questions:

1. What is the appropriate resolution for each of the leaders mentioned above?
2. What issues do confidentiality pose?
3. How often do these situations occur within your unit? How is it handled?
4. Discuss the solutions suggested below, and the implication for the unit, College:
   a. Leader A must realize that it is not about justifying, it is about explaining and sharing information. With-holding information is not the key to maintaining authority or power.
A true “leader” equips employees with the tools they need, including information, to perform the job.

b. Leader B needs to know that research shows that it is very important for adults to know why things need to be done. This knowledge provides the impetus for learning and motivation. Understanding the reasons behind decisions, helps employees feel part of the solution as well as valued members of the team, fostering commitment and dedication.

c. Leader C is unfortunately experiencing a common problem. However, this must not be an excuse to just dictate action to employees without providing explanation. If Leader C does not know or understand why things must be done a certain way, then Leader C must make the effort to find out. Leader C must ask, probe, and research to find the answer that needs to be shared with employees. So what if Leader C cannot get the answer? Leader C will know firsthand how the employees feel. Honest communication is a best practice.