

EAO Newsletter- September Issue

Intro:

We've all experienced the disappointment and let-downs that come with unrealistic expectations. You might struggle with over-committing to projects and getting stretched too thin, with your work relationships and well-being taking a hit. You may have felt the frustration that comes from giving or being given an urgent deadline in addition to a full workload. You might even feel disappointment in your personal life, leading to stress around changing relationships or family events that don't go as expected.

Disappointment is a part of life. However, many people experience disappointment at work because their expectations aren't realistic. While there are many ways to manage the discomfort of disappointment, here we will focus on setting realistic expectations. You can take steps to assess your expectations and make sure that they are aligned with reality.

What happens when a workplace has unrealistic expectations?

There are times it can be hard to know what to prioritize in the workplace, and employees can feel overwhelmed, leading to stress, frustration, or burn out. Sometimes, employees feel rushed to complete work under time pressure and don't produce their best work.

On the other side, supervisors can feel disappointed and "stuck" when teams aren't able to meet their expectations. They may start to second-guess their leadership abilities or lose confidence in themselves or their team. To avoid disappointment and make sure that expectations match up with reality leaders can benefit from taking a moment to assess expectations.

How can I assess my expectations?

When you need to assess or reassess your expectations, you will need to consider many factors, including:

- **Time:** how quickly can my team realistically complete this task? Take a second to evaluate your own assumptions about how long something will take, taking into consideration the other priorities that your team may be working on.
- **Ability:** Consider whether your team has the knowledge or skill level to meet the expectation that you've set. How can you support your team in developing the abilities that would meet your expectations?
- **Capacity:** A third factor to consider is capacity. Is this something that realistically fits on my team's workload? Even small tasks may prove challenging to complete if there are many additional competing priorities to consider.
- **Openness:** In addition to the factors mentioned above, think about your workplace culture. Does your team feel like they can bring concerns about unrealistic expectations to you? It is

easier to adjust your expectations when you have more information about time, ability, and capacity openly shared by your colleagues.

What happens when you establish realistic expectations?

Honest, realistic expectations can be challenging at first, but they will help to create a healthier and more productive workplace with the following benefits:

- Realistic expectations help employees to get a better sense of their own workloads and decrease feelings of being overwhelmed. Clarifying priorities and assessing the most realistic next steps helps people move forward proactively and independently, while preserving a healthy work-life balance.
- When expectations line up with reality, it builds trust within the workplace. Employees can be honest about what is holding them back, which allows supervisors to adjust expectations or work to remove obstacles. Your team will be able to deliver on commitments that realistically assess team time, ability, and capacity.
- Committing to realistic expectations also helps you to see potential areas for growth more clearly. With a more accurate sense of what you can accomplish, you can identify your challenges more easily and develop plans to improve them.

Assessing your expectations to ensure that they're in line with reality promotes a healthier workplace culture and ensures that promises can be kept. If you aren't sure where to begin, reach out to the EAO for a free management consultation. Our trained counselors can support you or a coworker in evaluating your own relationship to expectations. We can also provide referrals to other campus resources that might be able to support you at the unit level. We can be reached at eao@mailplus.wisc.edu or 608-263-2987.

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