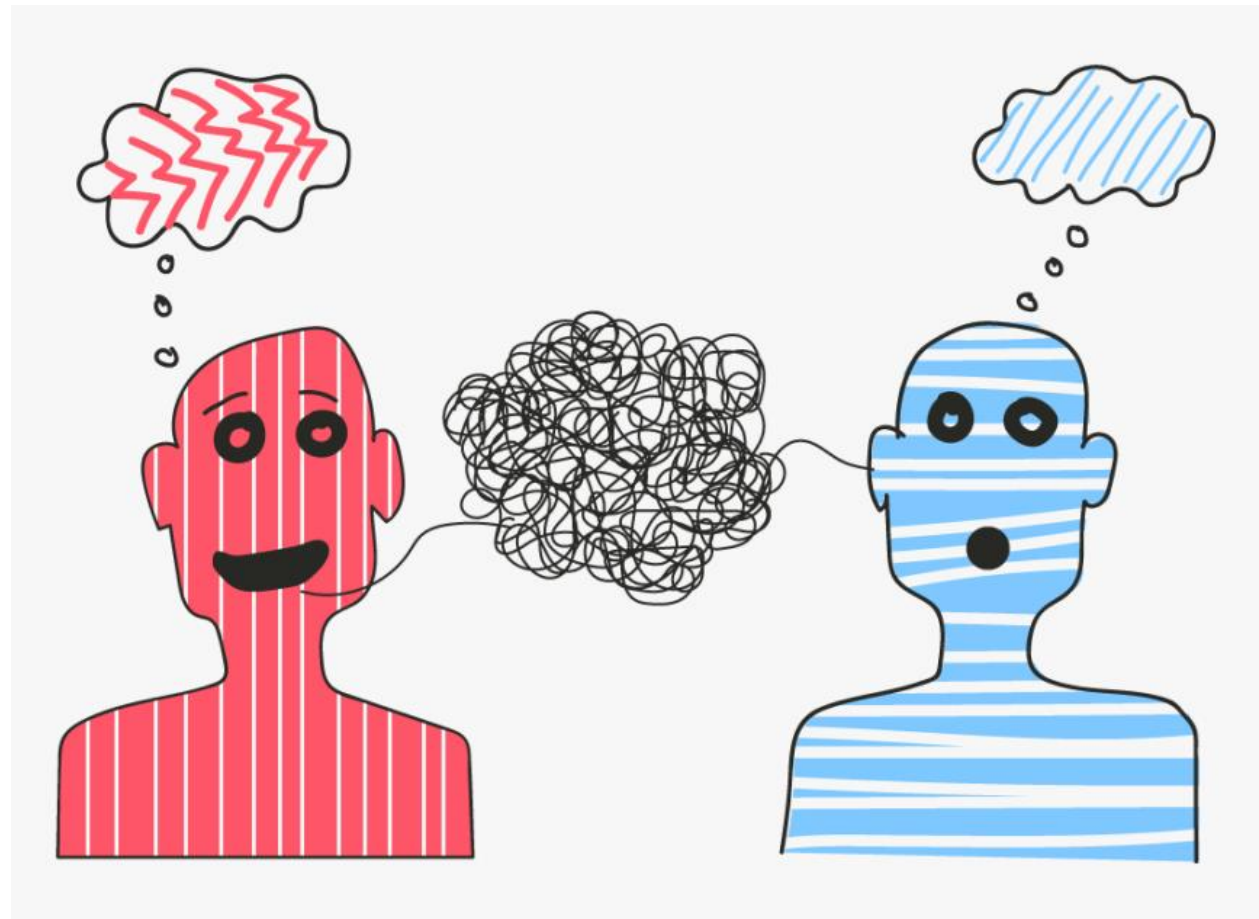


# Managing Mismatched Expectations

Dynamic Team Solutions | Candice | March 27th, 2023



Effective communication is a universal goal of companies worldwide. To have highly productive and cohesive units, we must be able to direct, listen, lead, and provide feedback well. But oftentimes, we fall short, which can cause confusion, delays, and friction in the workplace.

It isn't the words we speak that cause confusion—but our expectations of how those words will be understood and interpreted. We each have a unique set of experiences that dictates how we understand things. To that point, some people might read directness as confidence, while others see it as authoritarian or demeaning.

Our perception has less to do with others and more to do with our own past experiences. Our experiences, even the lessons we've learned from hearing the experiences of others, color our own expectations. Take the story I shared in this video. A project manager named Erica needs

to communicate some major changes in timelines and deliverables to her team. She has a meeting with Joseph, the team leader, to let him know.

Erica and Joseph leave the meeting both seemingly on the same page—there are some things changing, and the team needs to know about them. However, Erica expects Joseph to let the team know that day, maybe even within the hour, while Joseph plans on telling the team the following week at their regular meeting.

Why does this happen? The two appeared to have a mutual understanding. Did Joseph not realize the significance of the changes? Erica could easily make that presumption.

Joseph, we learn, did know the changes were important. The problem was that he and Erica both came into their interaction with pre-established viewpoints. Those viewpoints, a by-product of the experiences each of them had had, led them to different understandings of how things should be prioritized.

So, how can you avoid this sort of inevitable difference in expectations at work? Adjust your communication to both share your experiences and come up with a plan that entertains everyone's different viewpoint:

1. Identify what you want. Erica did this well when she told Joseph about the changes needed. She knew it would impact the team greatly, so she wanted them to be aware as soon as possible.
2. Communicate specifics. While Erica was clear about the changes that were afoot, she failed to tell Joseph she expected him to tell the team as soon as possible.
3. Share your experience—your “why.” Erica missed this step too. She wanted the team to know about the changes immediately as she knew they would greatly affect the team's workload and schedules. Erica felt they should know now, in order to be prepared and ready to kick off the new responsibilities on Monday. Meanwhile, Joseph wanted to wait until the following week as he believed news of these changes would become a distraction that could possibly keep the team from meeting their Friday deadline. He wanted to wait for a fresh week, so they could finish the current week strong and without interference.

When Erica and Joseph hear each other's experiences, they can better strategize a plan together. Such purposeful communication, which includes sharing our experiences, concerns, and beliefs, leads to much better problem-solving and allows for joint strategizing.

The benefits of this shared learning stretch beyond the problem at hand. As Erica and Joseph's awareness is broadened to include the other's experience, root concerns become jointly understood and future decision-making is expedited. Further, the potential for either to misread the situation and make assumptions about the other's competence or behavior will be alleviated. Over time, instead of conflict, we can expect Erica and Joseph to build a more supportive working relationship that empowers them to make collaborative decisions seamlessly.

Coming into interactions with a clear vision of what you want, specific details on how you expect it to happen, and the reason or experience behind why you want it a particular way,

creates the sharp difference between clear, meaningful communication and a muddled mess of blame, tension, and disagreements.

Most of us come into workplace interactions with good intentions, but the outcome becomes dissatisfactory when another party (accidentally) behaves outside of our expectations. By learning to communicate thoroughly – including listening to each other's experiences – before coming up with a course of action, you can avoid the damage of mismatched expectations. With this added effort, mistakes are minimized, your company will flourish, and your staff will experience the transformation of being a true – and dynamic – team.