

Leadership in 20-Minutes or Less

Tackling Time Constraints on the Leadership Front Lines

By Alan Vengel, author of *20 Minutes to a Top Performer: Three Fast and Effective Conversations to Motivate, Develop, and Engage Your Employees* (McGraw-Hill, 2009)

Now more than ever, time is of the essence. Frustrated leaders face more and more demands with fewer and fewer resources. One such demand is for constant coaching, mentoring and motivating.

What does it take to lead in today's busy climate? Conversations – a genuine back and forth with teams, team leaders and individuals – makes all the difference. However, due to unrealistic time constraints, many leaders don't have the time – or want to take the time – to have these very vital conversations.

Research indicates that not only is coaching becoming less effective, but it's taking longer and longer to produce less and less. A survey of 710 managers by Blessing White found that 33% felt "Coaching is too time-consuming." In this global survey, up to 42% of 2,000 managers around the world indicated that coaching takes too long. Time is precious; 29% of leaders complain that they just have too many direct reports for time-intensive coaching.

I know what you're thinking: "With all that's on my plate, with as many employees as I have, now you're telling me to hit them up one-on-one for better results? Do you know how long that's going to take?" I absolutely know how long it's going to take because I've been sharing my 20-Minute Leader philosophy with managers all over the country for years. What I've learned is that the less time you have, the more effective you have to make every minute. Trust me, those 20 minutes could pay off in ways that include higher ROI, more effective employees, better sales – you name it.

More specifically, you don't have the time NOT to do it.

Less Time, More Results with 20-Minute Conversations

You CAN have more results in less time; specifically, you can have genuine, effective and productive results in 20 minutes or less. Many leaders think conversations have to last an hour, or at least a half hour, to be effective. But after decades of research, and considering modern attention spans, I have discovered that team members really only require 20 minutes of active conversation to produce remarkable results.

Writing in *The National Teaching & Learning Forum*, authors Joan Middendorf and Alan Kalish contend, "Adult learners can keep tuned in to a lecture for no more than 15 to 20 minutes at a time." Carmine Gallo, the author of *10 Simple Secrets of the World's Greatest Business Communicators* adds, "Research shows that after 15 to 20 minutes our attention drops dramatically."

The 20-Minute Conversation Template

Retention is a critical part of learning; and good leaders know that nothing is more vital to productivity than learning. According to Dr. Donald E. Wetmore, Management Professor at Mercy College, "We retain 10% of what we read. We retain 20% of what we hear. We retain 30% of what we

see. We retain 50% of what we hear and see. We retain 70% of what we say. We retain 90% of what we do.”

20 Minute conversations help employees retain more because they become active participants in their own job growth. You can talk to an employee and they will retain 20% of what you say; or you can actively engage an employee in a serious back-and-forth discussion and help them retain 70% of what *they* say!

The following template will help you guide employees through an effective 20-Minute Coaching Conversation:

- **Expectations and Importance:** Give yourself 1 – 3 minutes to state your expectations and why they are important. Team members need to know what you expect before they can give it to you; this opening sequence of the 20-Minutes gives you the time to let an employee know exactly what you need and how important it is to the organization.
- **Questioning and Listening:** Next, take 4 – 10 minutes to do your questioning and listening. Conversations aren't one person talking and the other person listening; they are an equal partnership in the employee's growth. Spend the bulk of the conversation, 4 – 10 minutes, questioning the employee about his or her expectations and how to achieve mutual satisfaction on a given issue. Remember, employees retain 20% of what they hear but 70% of what they say.
- **Solution and Agreement:** Finally, schedule the last 5 – 7 minutes to select a solution and get agreement. This must be a reasonable goal that can be achieved through specific action steps upon which you both agree.

Clarity is the Main Ingredient of Communication

At the end of the day we are all here to get work done. Creating a winning template for your own 20-Minute Coaching Conversations merely sends the message that you care about productivity to the point of being clear, concise and compelling in your day-to-day interactions with staff and team members. In turn, they will act accordingly.

Managers who are more open and straightforward in their business dealings build credibility with their direct reports. When they show the courage to say what they need in a direct, no-nonsense manner people know where they stand and what is expected. Again, the key word here is **clarity**. By being a role model for clear, direct communication, the message to the rest of the team is that we can be clear and direct with each other.

About the Author

Alan Vengel is the founder of Vengel Consulting Group (www.vengelconsulting.com). The author of *The Influence Edge*, *Sprout!* and *20-Minutes to a Top Performer*, he teaches workshops at Fortune 1000 companies and is a sought after speaker on topics of Influence , negotiation and improving talent engagement.