

# Maximize your leadership potential: **BUILD TRUST**

## Advocacy

Hi! My name is Steve Slater, and today I would like to discuss with you the competency of Advocacy. Strictly speaking, advocacy refers to the ability to adopt and actively support a cause, idea, or policy. Certainly, the ability to take a position and then effectively support it is an important skill, but in the context of leadership there is much more to it.

As a core leadership competency, advocacy includes taking an active interest in the goals and perspectives of your employees – and acting as a sponsor of these ideas where it makes sense and offers high impact.

### Take Time to Listen

To leverage advocacy in your work, you have to be open and willing to take the time to listen. Everyone has good ideas and the desire to be heard. When leaders do not take the time to listen, these ideas can be left on the table and employees can become indifferent to their work.

Consider the following scenario: John is a manager at a mid-sized software development company. At Friday's team meeting, John introduces a new initiative that will change the way the team collaborates from week to week. As the meeting ends, John asks, "Does anyone have any questions?" After a short pause, John says, "Great! I have a good feeling about this project and look forward to your assistance!" By closing the discussion before it had barely even started, John might be missing a great opportunity to hear the team's ideas or concerns about the project.

Remember: Your team members were selected for their skills and expertise in specific areas. They are often the ones who will carry a plan of action forward or bring a project to its successful conclusion. Consulting your team could provide you with insight to strategies that have not been considered or risks not yet identified. At the very least, by consulting you communicate to them that their perspectives are valued and welcome. Even if the decision is not popular, your team might be more likely to carry it forward with commitment if they were given a chance to share their views or ideas.

### Show Your Care

For many of your employees, their work is not just "a job." Most of them care deeply about what they do. And many see their job as one important step along their career path! One of the best ways to show that you care is to let them know that you understand this as well. Look for opportunities to be an advocate for their professional development and improvement.

Of course, not every job provides regular opportunities for an employee's growth and development. But you can still show your interest and investment by taking the time to ask a few questions. "What parts of your job do you find the most

### **Why it matters?**

*By being an advocate, you can show employees that you value their knowledge, experience, and perspective. You can also enhance their engagement by seeking their input around decisions that will affect their work.*

*Further, through your advocacy you show that you are sincerely interested in each person's professional development.*

interesting?” “Are there areas where you would like to like to learn more?” “Where do you see yourself in your profession five years from now?” If you take the time to ask, you might be surprised at some of the answers. And you might notice opportunities to provide training or development.

Here are several suggestions for how you can advocate for the development for your employees:

- **Consider job-shadowing.** Job shadowing can provide your employees with a better understanding of your organization and its various moving parts. That understanding can, in turn, improve their performance in meaningful ways.
- **Suggest a plan for cross-training.** Cross-training makes sense not only for the health of your operation; you can use cross-training to enable the development of your employees within their current role. The knowledge and skills they gain might come in handy during a time of need. It could even facilitate the opportunities for an individual’s promotion within your organization.
- **Identify a conference or other professional event.** Conferences and other events provide valuable insight into trends and other best practices in your professional area. Employees often return from these types of events recharged and excited to share what they have learned.
- **Provide formal training opportunities.** Where available, consider providing employees with a dedicated section of time each month to take advantage of more formal training opportunities. These can be instructor led classes, such as the UF Supervisory Challenge, or online courses. Training opportunities are everywhere. All you need to do is make a little time and show your support for their continued development.
- **Consider entrusting your employees with more responsibility.** By providing new and challenging opportunities, you can show your trust in their abilities and sponsor their growth.

To truly advocate for your employees and their continued development, you need to be able to take a positive view of their potential. Challenge yourself to set and maintain high standards for the workplace, but show your confidence in their ability to improve and rise to these challenges!

If implementing employee advocacy in your workplace sounds like too much work, think again. The small amount of time you spend will be a worthy investment in your employees, one that will pay dividends of appreciation and trust. Even if you’re limited in the options you can provide, it can mean a lot to your employees that their leader took the time to ask...and listen.