

## TIE YOUR SHOES!

*By Marilyn Thiet*

How often do your employees disappoint you with subpar work or underperformance? Have you asked them to do something and either they don't do it, or the execution is not up to your standards? Have you asked sales people to prospect more, or a team leader to resolve an issue or create a new strategy without seeing any results? If any of these scenarios ring true, very likely the issue is not the employee, but instead the issue may be with you, their leader and supposed coach.

Too often as leaders we assume our teams possess a higher competency level. We assume because we hire someone who was successful in sales that they possess all the key sales skills necessary to succeed in our company. We assume because our top accountant was promoted to the role of accounting manager that he or she knows how to lead people or create a strategic team plan. We assume the person who has performed in the past has all of the competencies to succeed today. We make a lot of assumptions and yet we all know the old adage about assuming...

Asking an employee to do something they do not fully understand or have the competency to do is like asking a two year old to tie their shoes. Imagine the frustration of a two year old whose parent keeps telling them to tie their shoes, but the child does not know how to do this. The difference between a two year old and our employees however, is that a two year old will tell you "I don't know how to tie my shoe". In most cases, unless there is an extraordinary high level of trust and emotional intelligence, an employee will not raise their hand and tell their manager that they don't really know how to do something. Especially when they have told us in the interview that they can do everything necessary to perform the job!

Our job as a leader and coach is to truly understand the competencies of each person on our team and coach them on the areas that need developing. When teaching a two year old to tie their shoe we must first give them the knowledge of how to tie a shoe. For many of us that was the story of making two "bunny ears", looping them together etc. But just giving someone the knowledge does not mean they are able to complete the task. Those of us who have taught a child to tie a shoe can remember what those first attempts really looked like. But we praised the effort and allowed the child to continue to practice and develop the skill until today when we tie our shoes as adults it is such an ingrained behavior that hopefully we don't have to even think about making the "bunny ears". The same holds true with coaching and developing a skill in our employees. I cringe every time I hear a leader say, "They should know how to do that, I sent them to the training." Again we are back to the assuming adage. Training a person in a skill or competency is a great first step in starting to impart the knowledge. But we must work

with them to help them practice the skill, providing both positive and constructive feedback along the way until the behavior is ingrained.

Think about the things you are asking your employees to do and the results you are getting. Are you making too many assumptions? Are you like the parent telling the frustrated two year old to tie their shoe? If so trying to dig a bit deeper into the issue to understand the knowledge or skill level, ask questions to uncover the root cause of the behavior or performance issue. Only then will you be able to be an effective coach in helping to develop your employees and realize the performance and results your business needs. What about you? As a leader, do you have the skills and competencies you need to effectively coach your teams? If not, don't be afraid to raise your hand and ask for help, training, and guidance in learning the appropriate ways to coach and develop your team.