

DISCUSSION GUIDE for:  
**Building Employee Morale - Missed Opportunities™**

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People-managers usually reserve praise for the employees or teams that exceed the standard requirements of a job or project. Building Employee Morale says:

- Do not be unimpressed by employees who are receiving JUST a Meets Job Standards rating on evaluations.
- Employees who are meeting job standards should be praised for doing so.
- If a Meets Job Standards rating is not an impressive accomplishment, your job standards need to be re-evaluated.

The points above may seem simple and obvious, but as a facilitator, you will see as you start the discussion just how deeply rooted the “Meets Problem” really is; most supervisors feel that Meets performance deserves only a pay-check and nothing more; that praise should be the reward for excelling; that this act of reserving praise for Exceeds performance is the carrot managers dangle to get more out of their employees.

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1. Begin Class.
  - a. **ASK:** What are the benefits of higher employee morale?
    - i. **Facilitator Note:** Use a flip pad or marker board to post the list.
  - b. **ASK:** What are the ill-effects of low employee morale?
    - i. **Facilitator Note:** Use a flip pad or marker board to post the list.
  - c. **SAY:** Let’s watch a video that suggests a simple way to Build Employee Morale.
2. Play the video.
3. After the video has ended give the class an opportunity to stand up and stretch, but do not give them a full break; you do not want them talking about this video without your debriefing first. After the stretch, go over the questions posed at the end of the video:

For the team you lead, is there a difference between employee performance that meets JOB standards, and what meets YOUR Standards?
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For the team you lead, is there a difference between employee performance that meets JOB Standards and what meets CUSTOMER Standards?
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Praising employees for meeting standards? Wouldn't that be encouraging mediocre performance?

**Facilitator Note:** *This question may lead you into a hornet nest; you may very well have a handful of folks who have not yet had their life-changing experience and will say that praising employees for meeting standards would be encouraging mediocre performance. If you do, stop here and go through the "MEDIocre NBA PLAYER?" discussion questions.*

So what about the employees that EXCEED Job Standards? Do we stop giving them special recognition in fear of making the "meets people" feel inferior?

How can you address the meets problem at the team level?

How can you address the meets problem at the individual level?

**4. Summarize what has been learned by the MEETS PROBLEM Discussion:**

- a. Do not be unimpressed with a Meets rating.
- b. Praise should not begin with the people who exceed standards; praise should begin at the meets level.
- c. If a meets rating is not an impressive accomplishment, your standard is too low.
- d. If you are not praising employees that are meeting standards you are missing opportunities to build employee morale.
- e. **The balance challenge here is to:**
  - i. **Show appreciation for those that consistently meet standards, without making the employees that consistently exceed standards feel as if they have the same "value" as the people who consistently meet standards.**
  - ii. **Ensuring that those who consistently exceed standards know how much you appreciate the extra effort, without making those who consistently meet standards feel inferior/unappreciated.**

The above questions and discussion should be enough to lead the participants to the correct conclusion; If you have more time, or still feel the class could use more clarity, go through the questions called "MEDIocre NBA PLAYER?"

If your audience is an executive or senior management audience, you should pose the set of questions called "WHY SHOULD I WOW YOU?"

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**MEDIOCRE NBA PLAYER?**

- a. **ASK:** If you were going to a professional basketball game, what would you (the consumer and customer) expect out of your team on the court?
  - iii. **Facilitator Note:** Use a flip pad or marker board to post the list.
- b. **ASK:** Therefore, the team owners should require what skills and performance out of the players?
  - iv. **Facilitator Note:** Use a flip pad or marker board to post the list.
- c. **ASK:** When a player performs at the level required by the team owner, are they meeting standards, or exceeding standards?
  - v. **CORRECT RESPONSE:** Meeting Standards.
  - vi. **ASK:** So, if a coach praises a player for MEETING standards, are they celebrating mediocrity?
    - a. **Prepare for the problem Participant:** If you have someone respond "Yes," ask them if they would call any NBA player (starter or 2<sup>nd</sup> string) a mediocre basketball player. Your point being that if they've made the team and they are getting paid to play in the NBA...they cannot be considered a mediocre player.
    - b. **Another Word Picture: ASK:** What is the difference between a dirty, greasy, hole-in-the-wall diner and a five star restaurant? **Answer:** Standards. You are only celebrating mediocrity if the standard is mediocre.
- 2. **Say:** If our standards are set to a level that will impress and satisfy the customer, then a meets rating is a good thing - not something that is simply unimpressive.
  - a. **FUN:** Throw a prize out to anyone who says "You owe John a Royalty!"
- vii. **Say:** So the players that meet team standards:
  - 1. Get the privilege of playing on an NBA team.
  - 2. And they SHOULD be getting praised by the coaching staff for meeting team standards.
    - a. **ASK:** If the coaching staff praises a player for meeting the high demands of the customers (the crowd and the television audience), are they trading "wow" for improved employee morale? In other words, will stars cease to shine simply because they are getting a good dose of praise from the coach?

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- i. **Correct Response:** NO. There is still plenty of personal motivation for a player who has the talent to exceed, to WOW the audience. **Facilitator Note:** Use a flip pad or marker board to post the list.
  1. Being a starting player.
  2. Being a captain.
  3. Higher salary.
  4. Endorsement deals.
  5. Celebrity/Fame.
  
- b. If you praise the employees that report to you for meeting the high demands of our customers (internal or external), are you trading "wow" for improved employee morale? In other words, will employees become complacent with a meets rating simply because they are getting a good dose of praise from you?
  - i. **Correct Response:** NO. Employees who have the talent to exceed, will only thrive MORE in a positive environment.

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**WHY SHOULD I WOW YOU?**

**SAY:** Let's say we get a handle on this meets problem thing, and employees everywhere feel good about the work they are doing because their supervisors are thanking them for a job well done when they meet standards; morale is picking up.

**ASK:** What will happen if the people who consistently exceed standards start feeling as valuable as the people who are meeting standards? An NBA player that exceeds customer standards will have the following incentives for exceeding:

1. Being a starting player.
2. Being a captain.
3. Higher salary.
4. Endorsement deals.
5. Celebrity/Fame.

**ASK:** Can we offer anything like that to our stars?

**ASK:** What will happen to the stars if we do not have incentives?

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