ARE YOU A RESCUER?

When things go wrong in our area, it's easy for us to jump to the rescue. We don't necessarily fix it ourselves, but we find ourselves giving lots of advice and steering our teams in the right direction. We push out a lot of our own energy and information which can become tiring and frustrating.

MOVE FROM PUSH TO PULL

In these situations, ideally, we want to pull our team's energy and ideas towards solving the problem. If we regularly engage and involve them in this way, we help them learn to problem solve much more readily themselves. In future, they will get back on track more quickly with less input from us, freeing us up to drive strategy and results.

USING POWERFUL QUESTIONS

When team members come looking for help it's often because they feel stuck or uncertain about whether they will make a mistake. If you move from a Push to Pull approach, you can find out what's getting in the way of them completing the task and help them draw up their own action plan.

To make this switch from Push to Pull, we can use a variation on these four simple questions:

1. **WHAT ARE YOU TRYING TO ACHIEVE?** Based on their answer, you can check if they are clear what a good outcome would look like in this scenario. Once you've heard their views, you can fill in the gaps if they are missing any knowledge but do switch back to Pull as soon as possible.

2. **WHAT HAVE YOU DONE SO FAR?** This replaces you saying 'So, what you need to do is…'. They may well have already tried what you are about to suggest and encountered a hitch. You also need to know their level of understanding about what steps to take in this kind of situation. As soon as you start telling them what to do, you lose the opportunity to check their current knowledge and capability.

3. **WHAT COULD YOU DO?** You've helped them identify what they are trying to achieve, i.e., what success would look like in this situation. You've also helped them look at what they've achieved towards this so far. Get them thinking about how to bridge the gap between where they are now and where they need to get to – what are their options, what could they do?

   Warning – if they are dealing with a situation that's familiar to you, you are likely to listen out for them saying the actions you would take. Keep an open mind, they may have an alternative method of getting there that would still deliver the required result. Remember that, if they come up with the idea themselves, they will be more committed and confident to act. Ask them to double check their ideas against their goal – will they successfully deliver what they wanted to achieve if they take those actions?

4. **WHAT WILL YOU DO?** This is their chance to sum up their new action plan, so they are crystal clear and confident on how to proceed.

LEARNING FROM THE PAST

If you are helping a team member (or even a client) learn from a past situation, you can alter the questions as follows:

1. What were you hoping to achieve?
2. What happened?
3. If you found yourself in a similar situation, what could you do?
4. What will you do next time?

EMPOWERING VERSUS RESCUING

If we want people to become more capable and confident, empowering instead of rescuing is the answer. The questions described empower the person to work out their own solution - you become a thinking partner rather than a fixer. Over time, they will be able to use this process and come up with answers by themselves.

THE TIME DILEMMA

Managers often say, 'I haven't got the time' to go through that process. When they recognise the number of times they are interrupted or distracted by needing to 'rescue' they often reconsider this view!