Conditions of Quality

As a business or executive coach, you may be asked to work with a manager on improving the working conditions for employees. You may also be called in to help the manager address poor morale. Whenever there is a problem in the workplace, you want to help the manager look at the three conditions of quality to determine where he or she may want to focus his or her efforts. There are three conditions for quality in the workplace:

1. A Need Satisfying Environment
2. Usefulness of the Work
3. Self-Evaluation

If there are problems in the workplace, often one or more of these areas need attention.

NEED-SATISFYING ENVIRONMENT

The first condition to pay attention to is the environment. We know from Module Two how important creating an environment that's conducive to change is to the coaching relationship. Well, it's just as important in the work environment. We also know this means establishing a need-satisfying environment. If you think it's a challenge to create a need-satisfying environment for one person, try doing it for a group! Yes, it is more challenging but certainly doable.

The idea is not for the manager to meet everyone's needs. That would be impossible. The idea is for the manager to create a workspace where workers are able to get their needs met if they choose to.

Survival

This means managers need to ensure safety at work. Naturally, there are some jobs filled with inherent risks. Workers know this when they accept the job. However, given any inherent risks, managers work to maximize the safety within them. Other elements of safety on the job are job security, freedom from oppression, and freedom from gossip. Of

course, managers aren't completely in control of these elements but they will work their best to minimize their occurrence. This does not mean they will coerce people into not gossiping. That would never work. However, if gossip is an issue, they make clear the expectations of no gossip and work to create a strong sense of team which would reduce the desire for people to gossip about one another.

Connection

The need for connection at work translates into relationships. Managers are certainly responsible for their part in their relationships with their workers. They want to communicate to their workers that they care about them and are concerned about their well-being both in and out of work. Then, it is a manager's job to facilitate a sense of team as much as possible to create positive relationships among workers. When a manager perceives a problem between two workers, he or she may attempt to intervene to work toward quicker reconciliation.

It is also a manager's job to facilitate the relationship between workers and upper management. This is accomplished by skillfully walking that fine line between supporting one's workers and fairly representing and supporting the decisions of management. Managers do not want to create an "us" versus "them" mentality at work. This is incredibly destructive.

Another responsibility of managers is to ensure each of their supervisees recognizes his or her contribution to the vision and mission of the company, agency, or group. Each person must experience their relationship with the overall direction of the group or they feel disconnected and thus are not meeting their need for connection.

Significance

The need for significance is critical in the workplace. Each person must feel important, knowing they have something worthwhile to contribute. Managers need to listen to and respect workers. Workers need to know they are important and what they say matters. Workers need to be given an appropriate amount of responsibility so they are being challenged but are not overwhelmed in order to feel in control and powerful.

Freedom

Freedom in the workplace involves creativity, choices, and independence. Managers want to provide workers with as many options as they can think of so they feel in charge of the direction of their work to the extent it's possible. Good managers also support creativity in their workers. They do not attempt to put people in "boxes" but rather give them freedom to try new things without fear of reprisal. Managers also want to give workers the proper amount of freedom—this means the amount of freedom for which they have responsible behaviors to manage. Managers don't want to give workers more freedom than they can responsibly handle, or they will be over their heads. However, nothing empowers workers more than knowing they are trusted to handle things they know how to handle. This translates into freedom from micromanagement.

Enjoyment

Enjoyment in the workplace is essential to worker's happiness. Of course, some people need more enjoyment than others just as with all the needs. However, managers need to allow workers freedom of expression to create enjoyment at work as long as that enjoyment is not hurtful to others. Enjoying work does not always mean a person is not working. There are many ways to incorporate enjoyment into one's workday that makes the day so much more pleasant. Good leaders know to encourage, rather than discourage, enjoyment at work.

Useful learning counts for the enjoyment need, as well. You want workers to get the proper training so they can do their jobs even better and be trained for promotions possibilities, too.

Individual Workers

These are general considerations to create a need-satisfying environment at work, however, if you are experiencing difficulties with individual employees, a manager may want to check in with that employee to see if his or her needs individually are being met at work. It could be that John's need to have enjoyment is interfering with Mary's need for significance as she can't concentrate on her work when John is throwing objects in his wastebasket and yelling, "Score." When this occurs, you want to encourage the manager to help each individual achieve a need-balance at work and if necessary, help the manager mediate the conflict between workers so everyone is able to meet their own needs. It's an awesome responsibility but well worth the effort. You want workers who are happy and energized.

USEFULNESS

Have you ever been asked to do something at work that made no sense? Me too! Did you do it? If you did it, did you do it well? Usually, those of us with high freedom needs don't even attempt to do those things that don't make sense to us. But even if you tried, it's difficult to do it well because you don't understand the purpose behind it.

Whenever a manager asks his or her workers to do something, the manager wants to be able to explain the WIIFM of the situation. WIIFM stands for "What's in it for me?" If the manager doesn't know the answer to that question for his or her workers, then you, as the coach, want to help your client identify the problem and get the information needed to provide the workers satisfactory answer. Occasionally, the answer will be, "I don't know why. It's a regulation from our governing body. I'm sure it makes sense to someone somewhere. We need to do it if we want to keep our license or our funding." Those are compelling reasons to do something as long as that doesn't become the answer to everything. That should be the exception rather than the rule. For most requests, the manager should be able to help workers understand how doing so will help them in some way.

And if, after asking for a purpose, the manager comes to realize there isn't a good one, then the request itself can be questioned, combined with something else, or possibly eliminated altogether.

<p style="text-align:center">SELF-EVALUATION</p>

Self-evaluation is often misunderstood. Some people take it to mean that managers just ask people to decide if their work is quality and then simply accept their answer. This is not what it was intended to be at all.

Self-evaluation does not eliminate the need for outside inspection and co-verification, however, no one knows better than the person himself whether or not the work done was quality, as long as two main conditions are present.

Opponents of self-evaluation are against it because they don't think they will get honest self-evaluation from their workers and they are concerned what to do if the accuracy of the self-evaluation does not match his or her own. Both concerns are quite valid and have an appropriate explanation.

Let's start with honesty. How does a manager get their workers to be *honest* with them? The only way I know to get honesty is to eliminate the punishment for telling the truth. In the workplace, this translates into: Managers can't ask workers to self-evaluate and expect them to be honest if they are worried the manager will hurt them with the information they give. When managers ask for self-evaluation, the workers need to know the manager's sole purpose is to support them and help them get the supervision, assistance, tools, and resources required to do a higher quality job. There can be no blame or punishment. In this situation, the situation is much more likely to get honest self-evaluation.

So then, how does a manager ensure *accurate* self-evaluation? The best way *I* know is to have a set of co-developed standards of quality for the worker to measure against. How can a person give their manager an accurate evaluation if he or she doesn't know what quality looks like? Whenever a new task is required, then a manager should sit down with the people being asked to perform the task and discusses what quality will look like— what time, energy, and resources will be needed to get the job done well, what support will be needed, and if there are any suggestions for streamlining or doing the task even better.

If this process has already been done, then a worker may be asked to do things they had no role in developing the measures for. This is fine as long as that person realizes they may make suggestions for improvement at any time.

Once the competencies or standards of quality have been developed, then it is relatively easy for a person to evaluate how they are measuring up. In my experience in supervising, the person generally is much harder on themselves, than I would be as their manager. I have never had the situation where I had to point out something to a worker

that I thought was a deficit while they saw it as strength. However, should that situation apply, then all the manager does is ask questions highlighting that particular area.

For example, a person self-evaluates that they have met all standards of quality for a coach. However, my concern is how they get along with their co-workers. They do not seem to be much of a team player. I might ask, "How are you doing in the area of relationships with your co-workers"? If the person answers, "Fine," then I may ask a follow up question such as, "How do you think your co-workers would answer this question"? Or I may say, "I'd like to tell you how it looks from my perspective."

Self-evaluation does not happen in a vacuum. There will occasionally be situations when the manager will have to point out things to workers that they may not see the same way as you. This will open the topic for discussion. It's not meant as criticism, nor is it meant that the boss is always right. It is recognized there may be different perspectives. Encourage conversation about them. Then decide how to proceed from that spot.

The idea is that managers and workers have a partnership to produce high quality results for the mission and vision of the company/agency/group. They both have valuable information and input into that goal. They can help each other move in the direction of quality when they recognize they are a team, rather than at odds with each other.

THE COACH'S ROLE

When you are called in to do business or executive coaching, often you will be helping your client do an assessment of the workplace. I am providing you a checklist to download at http://www.coachingforexcellence.biz/forms/condofquality.pdf that you can give to your business clients to assess the *Conditions for Quality*. They simply record the situation at the top of the page and then self-evaluate the situation by answering the questions. This will help you locate areas in need of attention.

QUESTIONS

Please answer the following questions and send them to
assignments@academyofchoice.com.

1. How will you work with someone who is a dictatorial manager who believes it's not his job to create a need-satisfying environment for his workers? He believes the problem is theirs. He believes if he doesn't micromanage and ride his workers hard, then they will never get the work done.

2. You are called in to a business where new paperwork regulations are creating a real bottleneck in the system. After discussing the problem with your client, you realize these new requirements duplicate other things workers are already doing. How do you approach the solution with your client?

3. Your client is complaining he can't seem to get accurate self-evaluation from employees. Whenever he does annual evaluations, he says people do not share any weaknesses. All they say is that all is well and they don't need any help with anything. What questions might you ask to uncover the *real* problem?