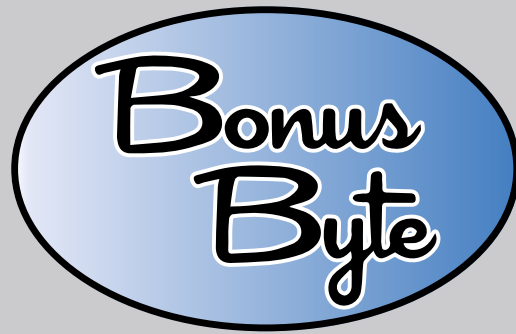


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How to Deal with a Complacent Person

HOW TO DEAL WITH A COMPLACENT PERSON

by Kevin Eikenberry

Leaders sometimes have to deal with complacent people – those people who are seemingly happy with their current position or status or job performance.

Gather leaders and coaches for any length of time and this challenge is likely to come up. Inherent in the challenge and the questions they ask about those behaviors is a sense of unhappiness and cynicism and frustration at not knowing what to do with “those people.”

If you identify with any of these situations and feelings, or even if you wonder how you would deal with complacent behaviors, read on – this article may surprise you, and it will definitely help you.

Labeling and Assumptions

First, a definition.

According to Dictionary.com, complacent is “pleased, esp. with oneself or one’s merits, advantages, situation, etc., often without awareness of some potential danger or defect; self-satisfied.”

As you can see from this definition, being complacent is an internal feeling. That implies that as leaders we are more likely to be assuming someone is complacent, rather than “knowing” it.

In my experience labeling someone as complacent is often making a tacit assumption that they aren’t willing to make a change; hence our frustration and concern!

The first key to coaching someone whose behaviors lead you to believe they are complacent is to avoid labeling as such. Next, through conversation begin to understand how they really are feeling and what they really are thinking.

Additionally, it is important to ask yourself: “why is the behavior a problem?”

Is she completing her work? Is he meeting job expectations? Clearly if behaviors aren’t meeting job expectations it’s different than if someone is meeting job requirements, but you just want them to “do more” or “be more proactive.”

Once you have determined that in fact there are job requirements or expectations not being met, you can begin to influence, coach and persuade. If not, perhaps your best course of action might be to let the behavior go as it is more of your perception than their job performance.

Five Strategies

Identify dis-satisfiers. If people seem (or are) complacent, they are in their comfort zone. When any of us are comfortable, there is little likelihood that we will want to change. Help people see that things are not perfect. Help them recognize that while things seem “fine” there are ways things could be better. This will be achieved most effectively by asking questions to help them recognize that however good things seem, they could be better.

Help them find a vision. Once people are wishing things to be (even a little bit) better, you set the stage for creating the picture of a more desirable future. You may have ideas about what the future looks like – a future with them using or developing new skills, or behaving in new ways. Help them create this picture, with a clear connection that as they reach this vision, their situation, however good it feels now, can be even better.

Identify impacts. How will the new future be better? How will it make them happier, more secure, more confident and more? Help them see all the consequences for the changes. While you may need to show negative consequences for not changing, don't focus all of your attention on impacts in this way. The positive reasons to change hopefully are even more powerful than the negative consequences of not changing.

Help them build a plan. With a disrupted comfort zone, a picture of a new future and a clear sense of why, complacency is on its way to being a memory. Help them craft a plan for getting from where they are to where they now have decided they want to be.

Let it go, or let them go. If after patience and effort you are not able to help them build a plan with a commitment to work the plan you must do one of two things. You must either let go of their behavior, recognizing you have done all you can do (if the performance is “fine” but not what you'd prefer), or you must let go of them – if their performance isn't up to the standards required for the job. Don't take either of these steps too soon, but recognize this may be the eventual end of the story.

These steps will help you understand their perspective and behavior and help you influence them to make changes that they understand to be in their best interest.

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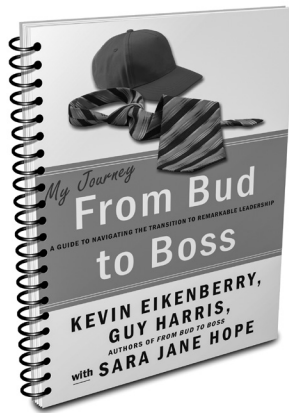
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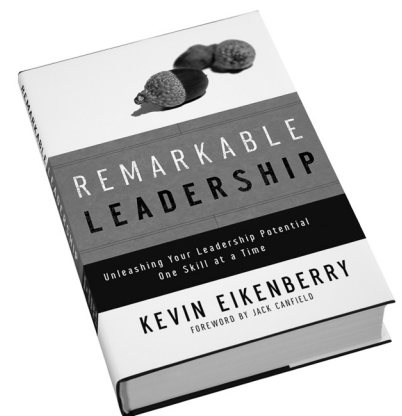


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A companion volume to the From Bud to Boss book, the Journey is a workbook designed to help you apply the knowledge gained to actual work experiences. It includes activities, questions, and exercises designed to take you beyond the concepts introduced to you during the Workshop or the book. And while this book is completely designed to be written in, all of the templates and tools are available in both PDF and Word document form so that you can use them over and over.

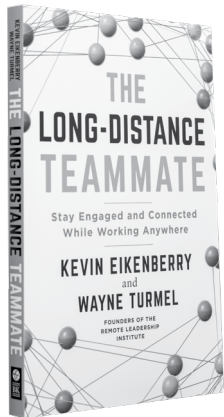
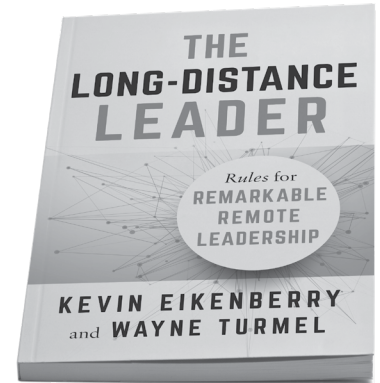
Remarkable Leadership

is a practical handbook written for anyone who wants to hone the skills needed to become a remarkable leader. This book outlines a framework and a mechanism for both learning new things and applying current knowledge in a thoughtful and practical way. It explores real-world concerns such as focus, limited time, incremental improvement, and how we learn.



The Long-Distance Leader

is a practical, candid look at what it takes to lead people, projects and teams in today's dispersed workplace. The book showcases 19 rules for being a remarkable remote leader, and offers practical models, tools, and best practices to tackle the real-world challenges from how we work and communicate virtually.



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Written by the founders of the Remote Leadership Institute, this book is the most authoritative single resource for helping remote workers get work done effectively, build relationships that are both productive and satisfying, and maintain a career trajectory when they are not in constant close contact with their leader, coworkers, or the organization in general.

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