Great-West Life
Centre for Mental Health in the Workplace

Good Enough vs. Perfection

Learning objective: This team-building activity can help develop shared and reasonable expectations in terms of quality of work.

Time required: Approximately 30 minutes, depending on group size.

Instructions:
Facilitate a discussion with your team about the concept of "perfection" vs. "good enough". It may be helpful to identify a specific project or process you wish to feature as the topic for the discussion.

As you start the discussion, be aware of differences. For example, some people strive for perfect results and value quality of work over speed. Other people value speed or quantity of work completed as a standard of success. Both are relevant and valuable when a reasonable balance is achieved. When these two types of employees work together and have rigid or extreme expectations, they may experience stress because of their different values and styles.

You may also wish to assign a note taker, so that you can share the discussion points with the group after the meeting. Facilitate the discussion according to the steps in the order shown below.

Suggested wording:
Although we talk about striving for excellence, it is important to distinguish when "good enough" is, *well*, good enough. It is not a realistic strategy to demand perfection 100 per cent of the time, and doing so can actually result in missing deadlines, hiding errors, or causing unnecessary stress.

Today we will look at [one of your existing tasks, processes or projects] and determine when good enough is acceptable and where excellence is necessary. We know that we may not all agree, but the goal of this conversation is to make a team decision that can help relieve stress due to unnecessary pressure.

1. First, let's identify the major tasks of the project or process.

2. Next, let's consider where a higher level of quality or attention to detail is necessary and why.

3. Now, let's consider the tasks where good enough is actually good enough, and how we would measure good enough.

4. What other stressors are related to this particular work?

5. Are there other ways we can manage or reduce stress while maintaining our ability to get the job done?

We've agreed on what must meet our highest standards and when good enough is still delivering an acceptable level of quality or performance.

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It's also helpful to be aware of the pressure for those who strive to achieve an absolute perfect quality of work, and the stress that they experience in working with those who do not share the same values. Constantly striving for perfection may cause stress that just isn't warranted.

On the other hand, those who feel judged or slowed down by unreasonable expectations of perfection can also feel stressed and overwhelmed.

Working hard is rarely the problem, but working under extreme pressure can be stressful. If we clarify what is reasonable and expected, we can help manage our workload better, reduce our own stress, and improve productivity.

Instructions:
Following the meeting, distribute the recorded notes to the group.

Activity developed with help from: Mary Ann Baynton, Mary Ann Baynton & Associates Consulting.