



What do you Tolerate?

When I was in high school, I had a math teacher who spent the first three days of the semester not solving equations but establishing a set of standards and expectations for how the class was going to operate. My classmates and I read rules, discussed emergency drills, walked through turning in assignments, and practiced entering and exiting the classroom. To my friends and I, this seemed elementary. To our teacher, it was imperative. Unbeknownst to me, what my teacher was creating in those first three days was a line in the sand. This line in the sand was communicated so clearly that everyone in the class understood exactly what was tolerated and expected regarding behavior, performance, and safety. In addition to this understanding, we knew that our teacher was going to hold us to these standards throughout the entire semester.

Jocko Willink, a retired U.S. Navy Seal officer and author of the book, “Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win,” has an interesting quote about establishing expectations as a leader. He says, “When it comes to standards, as a leader, it’s not what you preach, it’s what you tolerate” (Willink & Babin, 2017). A great deal of effort and planning go into creating a leadership vision and outlining standards for a team or an organization. However, what is often missed is the fact that the job is not finished once this information is shared. A leader must continue to communicate the vision and hold his or her team accountable. The truth is that all the time and effort it took to put performance and behavior standards in place will go to waste if the leader allows poor attitudes and actions that fail to measure up. Leaders must only accept what they expect.

Here are six simple ways to reinforce clear principles and eliminate substandard performance and behavior according to Tom Barrett’s article, “It’s not what you preach – it’s what you tolerate” (Barrett, 2018):

- If there are stated consequences for not meeting a certain performance measure, then enforce them. No exceptions.
- Recognize those who meet or exceed the stated expectations. Praise and recognize performance you want repeated.
- Say what you mean, and mean what you say.
- Don’t settle for mediocrity and exceptions. Continually push yourself and your team to perform at everyone’s best. Great teams bring out the best in everyone.
- Set a high standard. A chain is as strong as its weakest link – and so is your team.
- Be consistent. Leaders who keep moving the goal post and changing the rules of the game confuse and demotivate their team.

-Josh

Barrett, T. (2018, April 25) *It’s not what you preach – it’s what you tolerate*. LinkedIn.
<https://www.linkedin.com/pulse/its-what-you-preach-tolerate-tom-barrett>

Willink, J., Babin, L. (2017). *Extreme Ownership: How U.S. Navy SEALs Lead and Win*. United States: St. Martin's Publishing Group.