Lawrence Neal: Brandon, welcome back to the show.

Brandon Yonker: Thanks, Lawrence, it's a pleasure to be here. Thank you for having me.

Lawrence Neal: No, the pleasure is all mine. I really appreciate you coming on to contribute this bit of content. What we wanted to focus on is the topic of operations management. I mean, obviously you served as Operations Director for Discover Strength for a long time, and I'm sure that is instrumental in the success and the growth of that business.

Some of the things we spoke about offline were some of the key principles that you think about when it comes to operations management, and so we can go through those, and obviously I'll be asking questions along the way as you explain each one of those. Let's talk about the first one, which is setting expectations. Do you want to just talk about what that means, and how entrepreneurs can think about that and implement this in their business?

Brandon Yonker: Yeah, of course, absolutely. The first mindset here is that we have to set expectations clear for our employees or our direct reports. When you think about that, whether it's a business relationship, or really any relationship, everything flows from there. If two people understand the expectations in their relationship, it's going to be a lot better, or the process is going to go a lot better.

Now personally, I always set expectations clear, really around four areas. The first one is the key roles, or I guess you could call it the job description. That sounds so easy and so simple. Like, "Yeah, obviously I hired you as a personal trainer, but we need to be very, very specific in what that means."

So if I'm the manager, I have to set clear expectations around what the personal trainer position is, and then communicate that to my direct report or my new hire. That's not just true for the personal trainer position, of course, that's true for any position that you hire within your organization. So that's the first one, setting clear expectations around the job or what the role is.

The second one is values of the organization, so whether you're a one-man shop or you're a big organization, it's utterly important that you set expectations around the core values of the organization. At Discover Strength, one of the things we did here, is we just set what we called a bar, we set a level, okay? We used a really simple rating system. We said plus, literally the symbol plus, means you're doing this 95% of the time. Minus means you're not doing this hardly at all, and plus/minus means yeah, you're kind of getting it, but you're really not.

Then every single quarter, or whatever ... frankly, we had a people discussion, we'd evaluate the person based on the values of the organization. We'd take our values, and we'd say, "Okay, how does this person size up?" And we set a bar and we said, "Well, our bar is three pluses, or two pluses," or whatever it may be, and if the person's above the bar, we know they're the right person for our organization. So that's the second area, is value, setting expectations around values.

The third one would be priorities. We use the term rocks at Discover Strength, but really these are priorities for that individual in the next 90 days. What are the things you need them to accomplish in the next 90 days in order to progress the organization forward? Now, this could be something really trivial and really elementary, or if it's a more senior position in your organization, it could be something very complex, but it's utterly important that you as the manager, you as the owner of the organization, communicate that to them and say, "Hey, this is what I expect of you in the next 90 days, and this is where I need you to be at the end of this 90 day period." We use 90 days because-

Lawrence Neal: Could you give us some examples of those? Sorry to interrupt. Some example of what that might look like from a trainer's perspective?

Brandon Yonker: Sure, absolutely. From a trainer perspective, it could be, "Recapture five clients," or, "Reach out to 25 clients that had had been with us in the past that we had lost, and get a certain percentage of them back in to do an introductory session," or it could be something a little more complex, like, "Redevelop the system for onboarding new trainers. Build the process for facilities maintenance."

I mean, it's your job as a manager to look at your organization and say, "Okay, this is where we're going. I understand that I can't go at it alone," meaning, "I'm the manager, I can't do everything myself. What things do I have to have my staff do in the next 90 days that progress us towards those goals?"

We get really creative when it came to this, but that was always our mentality, and frankly, it's my managerial mentality moving forward is you have a team of X number of people, it's naive to say that you can do it all yourself. Frankly, you're responsible. You have to look at the staff and say, "Okay, what are the things that I can have them do in the next 90 day period in order to get us on track to hit our ... excuse me ... to hit our organizational goals for the year?"

You'll be amazed ... maybe not amazed, you'll be very impressed by how that's actually very motivating for people. I think oftentimes, especially in the high intensity community ... or excuse me, the fitness community, rather, people say, "Yeah, they're just trainers. Just train a certain amount of people and punch in, punch out."

But no, people want to build something that's bigger than themselves, so if you give them, "Yeah, well, I want you to come in and train. That's your job, those were the roles. We set expectations clear around those, but I also have an expectation that you're going to do this, this, and this in the next 90 days."

A good number for trainers, by the way, or really just employees in generally is probably like three to five at most, five being the very top end, but three simple well-defined objectives for them in the next 90 days. If you can implement those things, you'll be really amazed by how it can help your organization and progress you towards your goals.

Lawrence Neal: I love that, because it also makes the job sound so much more meaningful, because I can imagine that some personal trainers might find the job somewhat boring over time.

Brandon Yonker: No, you're 100% right, you're 100% right.

Lawrence Neal: Even if they are passionate about their training, I think a lot of people don't realize they're going to be training certain populations that might not be that fun to train sometimes, and so it's a great idea to have these milestones that they can focus on. Sorry, so okay, so that's point ... I think the third thing, isn't it? The rocks. Is there a fourth within this expectations space?

Brandon Yonker: Yeah, there is. The last one is what I would call measurables. This is just a tracking mechanism, okay, so what this would be is a way to track someone's progress from a quantifiable perspective. So if we get back to the previous statement, the rocks, priorities, let's say I set your priority at getting 10 new clients in. Okay, I just made that up. Get 10 new clients in the next 90 days.

Well, that's also a measurable for you in the sense that okay, you have 10 people you're supposed to get in. I'm going to periodically check in with you throughout the quarter and say, "Okay, Lawrence, right now we're a third of the way into the quarter, and you have two of 10. Well, we need to get you back on track to get back up in that three, four range, if we're only a third of the way through the quarter."

Or, "Hey, we're half way through the quarter and you only have one person of your 10. We need to develop some mechanisms here, or have an interaction that we can get you back on track for us." So our measurable is just a number that that individual's trying to hit or a statistic that they're trying to drive. This is really applicable for your sales teams specifically, but it could be applicable to any position.

It's just a tracking mechanism throughout the quarter that they review on a weekly basis so they can decide, "Oh, okay, I'm on track," or, "I'm off track, and I really need to make some change here to get me back on track." Otherwise, what happens is you wake up half way through the quarter, three quarters a way through the quarter. You've started to review the priorities, and you're like, "Oh crap, we're way off track for that," whereas when you have a measurable in place, you can check every single week to make sure that your direct report, or even yourself, if you are the direct report, is on track to achieve that quarterly priority that you had established. The final one, as I said, is measurables.

Lawrence Neal: Love that. Yeah, so it was Peter Drucker said, "What you don't measure, you can't manage," right? I think that's the quote, if I've got that correct.

Brandon Yonker: I think that is the quote, you nailed it.

Lawrence Neal: No, it's so true, and otherwise you just find yourself doing the wrong activities a lot of the time. No, that's really cool. Okay, so those are kind of the four points that underpin the setting expectations. Is that right?

Brandon Yonker: Absolutely. The only other piece here, and this isn't even a fifth piece, this is just a mentality when it comes to setting expectations clear, is this; oftentimes as the manager, we think expectations in terms of our expectations of my direct report. But it's a two way relationship, and it's important that the manager understands the direct report's expectations of them. The question is, well, how do you do that? The answer is simply just ask them. Sit down and say, "Okay Jim," "Okay, Lawrence," whatever the name may be. "What are your expectations of me as a manager?"

When I first was turned onto this topic, I was irresponsible, and I kind of wrote this piece off. Just to give you a quick story, I had been managing a direct report for about two years, and after a certain period of time, I noticed that there was an animosity there, there was some tension between us. It got to a point where it kind of blew up, and we had a heated conversation.

I learned in that exact scenario that that was my fault. I had done a good job of setting my expectations clear to him, but where I'd failed is not understanding his expectations of me. All he wanted was when I delivered something, he didn't want me to deliver it in a condescending tone. He thought that I was coming down on him as opposed to just saying, "Hey, how can we work together to achieve our goal?"

To sum it up, the point here being as a manager, you have to understand your expectations of your direct report, of course, but you also have to understand their expectations of you, and then tailor yourself for them. That's the whole, "different strokes for different folks," type thing. It's not a blanketed slate for every single direct report. If you try and make it that, you're going to run into a situation as I did.

Lawrence Neal: Awesome, okay. Cool. Is the next phase great communications, I think. Am I moving too fast, or are we moving onto that piece now?

Brandon Yonker: No, you're perfectly right on. The second portion here is from my managerial philosophy, is I call it communicating well, or great communication. There's a bunch of pieces that are involved here, but the general mentality is this; and I'm not going to try and quote the study, but there was a study done at one of the ivy league schools in the United States, and what they did was they had two people with a wall between them, and then they said, "Okay, person A, your job is to tap out a song." So a popular song, like Jingle Bells, or something like that, "Just tap it with your hand on the table."

Then the person on the other side of the wall was supposed to try and identify that song. What they ended up finding was less than 5% of the time, the person on the other side of the table couldn't identify the song. If you pull back the underlying message here, the applicability or the application is this; oftentimes when we're communicating something to someone, we think that it makes so much sense in our mind, because we know the song. Oftentimes, the person across the table, the direct report, the person on the other side of the wall, doesn't get it because they don't know the song. Does that make sense?

Lawrence Neal: Yeah, yeah.

Brandon Yonker: So the responsibility then comes back on us as managers to find a way to communicate that to them without simply tapping it out, if that makes sense, but tell them the song, tell them the underlying thought that's in our head. It's not the direct report's fault that they're not getting it. More often than not, it's the manager's fault that they are not communicating well. That's one of my favorite starting points when it comes to discussing this is we assume that people know what we're talking about, because the song's in our head, but oftentimes they're not getting the results, because we are not communicating well to them.

There's the general philosophy, but there's really three key things here, or three key tools I would say, under communicating well. The first one is this; you cannot have assumptions. As managers, or I would say it's common in a manager position, to assume that your direct report knows what you're talking about, or knows what you expect of them. In my opinion, that's just completely irresponsible. We should not make assumptions, we should quite literally ask the question, "Do you know my expectations? Do you know what I expect of you here? Do you know what I need you to do in order to be successful?"

If the person says, "Yes," great. Carry on. If they say, "No, actually I'm a little confused," then that gives you the opportunity to coach them, and teach them, and to be clear with your communication. If we start making assumptions, that's where we get into problems.

And again, this is applicable not only in a business setting, but in any relationship. I mean, if I assume my wife is going to do something and she doesn't, then I get pissed at her for not doing it. That's my fault. I have to communicate with her, "Hey, are we going to do this? Or we're going to do this together?" Whatever it may be. If I make an assumption, it's a dangerous, dangerous territory. So that's the first one, no assumptions.

Lawrence Neal: Nice.

Brandon Yonker: The second one is this, it's called echoing. It's a very simple philosophy, it's a very simple principle, but once you've communicated something to someone, simply ask them to echo it back to you. The question could go like this, "Okay, Lawrence, I've communicated something to you. Can you tell me what I expect of you? Can you reiterate to me what I just told you?"

At first it's going to seem weird. They're like, "You want me to tell you what you just told me?" But that's where the magic happens, because I promise you, a lot of the times they're going to communicate something back to you that wasn't exactly what you wanted, and therein lies the magic, therein lies the opportunity to then get on the right track.

Like I said, at first it's going to seem weird, but I promise you once you've committed to it, and once you've practiced it a few times and used it with a direct report, it will make your communication one thousand times easier, and way more productive because they've understood clearly what you want of them. Again, it seems like a simple tool, but it's incredibly powerful.

Lawrence Neal: A lot of the most powerful stuff is very simple, I suppose. I can see how that can be so efficient, because if you didn't do that, and in their head they've got a completely different understanding of what you expect of them than you do, then you could end up wasting hours, and days, and ... of unproductive work, and create tension between you, and you could reduce the risk of all of that, or eliminate a risk of all of that just by having a very simple conversation that you just explained.

Brandon Yonker: Exactly. This is a managerial principle, communicating well, that in my experience, we often take for granted. We think due to the study I described, "Well of course I'm communicating well," but the mark of great communication is this: did the person you're trying to communicate to actually absorb and understand what you were trying to communicate? Because if they didn't, that's not their fault, that's your fault that you were a bad communicator. Sometimes that's hard to swallow, but it's true.

Lawrence Neal: Yeah, absolutely. Is there anything more to this communications section?

Brandon Yonker: There is, there's one final piece, and this is a powerful one as well. This is called ... you could call it listening, if you will, but I like to call it the question to statement ratio. You've heard this before, and you've probably read about it before, but a key to great communication, especially in a managerial relationship, a manager and direct report relationship, is that the manager is making less statements, maybe about 20% statements, but asking 80% questions.

It's utterly important that you ask more questions than you give statements, because at the end of the day, the person's going to feel more bought in, and they're going to be able to more often than not come to a conclusion on their own if you then ask questions. So let's say a direct report comes to you with an issue, and let's say it's ... I mean, you can name the issue, right? As opposed to just solving the problem for that individual, as opposed to just making statements, you want to start by asking questions.

Here could be an example. "How did you come to that conclusion? What steps did you take to get to this point? What is your plan for moving forward?" Simple questions like that that get that individual thinking about what they did to get to that point to come into your office or talk to you. Once you do that, more often than not, they're able to either A, solve the issue on your own, or B, really appreciate the fact that you didn't just solve it for them, or just tell them what to do, but you challenged them to think through the process more and more.

This might seem ... I would say almost opposites of communicating to somebody, because listening is of course a part of communication, but you want to start with questions, then listen, and then provide solutions if necessary, if they haven't come to that point on their own.

Lawrence Neal: I love that, I think that's hugely important in all aspects of communication, not only with your staff but with your customers, with your prospects. None of us listens as much as we probably should. I mean, I've got a lot of experience in sales and developing my listening skills, and I still sometimes suck at it. It has to be something you have to be very cognizant of always improving on. Because like you say, it's very productive.

Brandon Yonker: I agree. I would also say that it's almost ... if you're a Type A individual, if you're a problem-solver, if you're an entrepreneur that's driven to get a result, you are very apt to just jump right in and solve that problem for the person, but what you don't realize that you're doing is you're actually hindering their growth.

You want to ask questions so they think through the process, so next time they encounter this situation, they don't need to come to you. They're not bringing issues to you. They can solve them on their own. If they are bringing issues to you, you can again challenge them with more and more questions to continue to develop them. That's where the magic happens, in my opinion, when it comes to this piece of communicating well.

Lawrence Neal: One more point before we wrap up this Part One, Brandon. Let's talk about this idea of consistent meetings. Do you want to just start off with talking about that, and how you manage that?

Brandon Yonker: Sure, absolutely. First of all, I would start off by saying having consistent, high quality meetings, whether it be with your team, or on an individual basis, or I should say and on an individual basis, are utterly important to being a great manager. The first one I would say is a weekly meeting is the key when you have a team setting. Now, take the concept of the meeting, but let's dive into the meeting itself.

Let's say we're sitting in a room with our team of five or 10 people, or whatever it may be. The first thing you want to keep in mind when it comes to a great meeting is the even exchange of dialogue. This kind of gets back to my last point of communicating well, but you don't want to be the only person in your meeting talking, otherwise it's basically a State Of The Union Address, which we're not looking to have.

The essence of a great meeting is your entire team being able to weigh in, and it's your responsibility as a manager to make sure that that happens. A great way to do this, let's say you have a quiet individual that often doesn't weigh in. A great way to do this is to ask them, "Hey, Bob, what's your opinion on this topic?" And Bob might say, "Well, I don't really have much," and you can challenge Bob a little bit more to bring some insight. That doesn't mean you have to have him talk for 10, 20 minutes, but just make sure that Bob as the opportunity to weigh in, and that there's an even exchange of dialogue amongst everyone in the meeting.

Another level of this would be is again, if you have a very Type A person on your team, someone who likes to dominate meetings, and talks often, that may or may not be the manager, it's your job then to curb that and say, "Okay, I totally understand what you're saying, but we need to get so-and-so's opinion as well," so it's not just one or two people talking, but you're truly getting the weigh in of everybody.

The tenet to having a great meeting pulse, one of the great tenets to having a good meeting pulse is even exchange of dialogue for everybody involved within the meeting. If you can get that, then you're going to have great weigh in from your team, which leads to a great buy in. That's key. If somebody weighs in, if they get the chance to voice their opinion, whether it actually goes their way or not, then they will definitely buy into whatever the solution is.

Lawrence Neal: What does the rest of the meeting look like in terms of how do you structure agendas, and things like that?

Brandon Yonker: Sure. I mean, so if you wanted to, I don't think that I'll be able to flush out here in the next even 10 minutes what a full meeting looks like, but I have a very in-depth plan of how to run a successful meeting, that honestly, when I meet with people and I tell people about how to create an excellent meeting agenda, this is the first thing that I start with when it comes to getting your team on the same page, is have a proper meeting agenda and stay on time. If you wanted to discuss that more and maybe even do a different episode on this, I would love to do that as well, because literally, I could give a full hour long keynote presentation on just how to run a phenomenal meeting.

Lawrence Neal: Awesome. Well, in that case, let's wrap this one up there, because we can cover off there, and possibly your points around having the importance of a quarterly review, and rewarding and recognition in that same episode. This has been great Brandon, thank you so much for joining me. I think it's been a nice little bite-sized piece of content for the members to listen and implement.

Brandon Yonker: Sure, absolutely. As I mentioned earlier, I really appreciate you having me on, and I'm excited to do our next portion.

Lawrence Neal: Nice one, take care, Brandon.

Brandon Yonker: Thanks, Lawrence.