manageris

Understand the feelings of your subordinates

The stakes

People frequently do not reveal what they are really thinking, for example, because they fear being judged or feel there is no point. This prudent attitude is more pronounced in times of uncertainty or change, even though mutual understanding is particularly critical at such times. Yet, understanding what people are really thinking and feeling is extremely valuable because it reduces the risk of misunderstandings, helps to explain why people may be reluctant to make decisions, or feel frustrated or blocked. So, how to encourage people to express themselves sincerely and transparently?

Four skills to master

To get people to share their feelings, setting up an interview and asking for their point of view is not enough. Managers must also work on their own attitudes and behavior and demonstrate their attentiveness, with the objective of arriving at a shared understanding of the situation.

Being aware of your assumptions helps to limit their influence. So, rather than anticipating the reactions of the other person, **try to listen objectively** to what he or she has to say.

- Try to identify your own feelings: What do you feel in this situation (anger, worry, enthusiasm, etc.)?
- Identify your expectations of the other person. Do you expect him or her to share your feelings? What logical reaction do you anticipate given his or her situation?
- **Spot your biases**: Is your perception influenced by certain traits of your character?

People find it difficult to share their feelings, because this makes them vulnerable. To encourage subordinates to express themselves openly, the manager must **build a bond of trust** over time:

- To inspire trust, demonstrate your own trustworthiness from day to day by being predictable and consistent, keeping your promises—or explaining why you can't—and showing concern for others.
- Be open about what is important to you to encourage others to do likewise.
- Capitalize on problems encountered: Conflicts are also opportunities to reinforce trust, because they deepen mutual understanding of other points of view.

BE AWARE OF YOUR ASSUMPTIONS

We tend to hear only what confirms our assumptions.

WORK ON YOURSELF

ADOPT AN EMPATHETIC ATTITUDE

 An unfortunate expression or gesture may cause people to clam up rapidly.

GAIN THE TRUST OF YOUR EMPLOYEES

People won't share their feelings unless they feel safe.

BE OPEN TO OTHERS

LEARN TO ASK THE RIGHT QUESTIONS

People aren't always able to formulate their real concerns spontaneously.



Some spontaneous attitudes and reactions may make people uncomfortable. Conversely, **developing your empathy**, i.e. your ability to put yourself in others' shoes, encourages others to share their feelings. To do this:

- Watch your attitude, including your non-verbal language. Some expressions or gestures are "dialogue killers" ("You don't understand," "Get to the point," frowning, etc.)
- **Objectively restate what you hear** without interpreting it to ensure shared understanding.
- Encourage the other person with your words ("I understand," "I see," etc.) and body language (posture, facial expression, tone of voice, etc.).

Even if people are willing to share their feelings with you, they might have difficulty putting them into words. You can help your subordinates explore their feelings by progressively **asking open questions**:

- Prefer open questions to closed questions, e.g. "How do you feel about what happened?" rather than "Are you angry?"
- **Propose several options** to help people clarify their thoughts, e.g. "How do you interpret the situation?" "What do you think might happen?" "What is jeopardized in your view?"
- Remember that all feelings are legitimate, and that you are not there to judge. If it's confidential, say so.