

EXPECTATIONS



Four Questions
that Expose Your
Supervisor's
Expectations
So You Can Make
Your Value Visible





A ComPsych Corp. study revealed that the highest cause of stress at work—for a whopping 31% of the workforce—was unclear expectations from supervisors.

Your Supervisor Needs Your Help to Define Your Expectations.

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We'll get to those 4 questions at the end, but they'll be more valuable to you if you read some background information first.

How Do I Get Clarification of What's Expected of Me?

Let me guess: you're one of the 80% that don't have clear expectations about your job. It's a problem. But it's also an opportunity. Once you get clear expectations, you'll have the advantage over those 80% that never get clear on them. So let me give you that advantage.

Why aren't you getting clear expectations? You could blame your supervisor, but these days, if you were the supervisor, even *you* might have a hard time. Here are some of the probable reasons for the lack of clarity:

- Your job is ambiguous, and your supervisor hasn't really figured out how to make it any clearer.
- Your supervisor hasn't realized how ambiguous he is when he's trying to share expectations with you.
- Your supervisor came from another department and doesn't really know what to expect from you, except that you need to show up and do something.

There are plenty of other reasons. But rather than cover every possibility, let's focus on how to help you and your supervisor and you clarify your expectations.

Why You Work

I want to make sure you and I agree on why you work. You work to produce valuable outputs. Your employer hopes these outputs produce value for the employer. You hope your efforts lead to career rewards.

If you're only going to work to get the paycheck, you may not care about the rest of this article. But if you're going to work to build a career, or at least enjoy your job while getting better raises and/or promotions than run-of-the-mill workers, keep reading.

What Do Clear Expectations Look like?

Clear expectations have the following elements:



The output is something you produce. It's described by a noun or a noun phrase. Sports give us examples we can recognize:

- Baseball: a base hit.
- Soccer: a goal.
- Basketball: a blocked shot. We could have gone with a basket, but I'm tall, and my favorite move was blocking shots.



To avoid subjective evaluation, you'll need criteria you and your supervisor both agree with to describe when that output has been successfully performed. In sports, rule books and officials make sure athletes only get credit for produced outputs when criteria are met.

- A Base Hit (Baseball)
 - The runner has reached first base on a fair ball.
 - There was no fielder's error on the play.
 - No runner was forced out on any other base during the play.
- A Goal (Soccer)
 - The ball was completely past the goal line.
 - The ball entered the goal between the goal posts and below the cross bar.
 - The goal happened during regular time.
- A Blocked Shot (Basketball)
 - The defender deflects an attempted shot on the basket.
 - There was no foul called on the play.



A Way to Measure Achievement

When defining expectations, you need to use statistics that show you've produced the outputs you claim to produce.

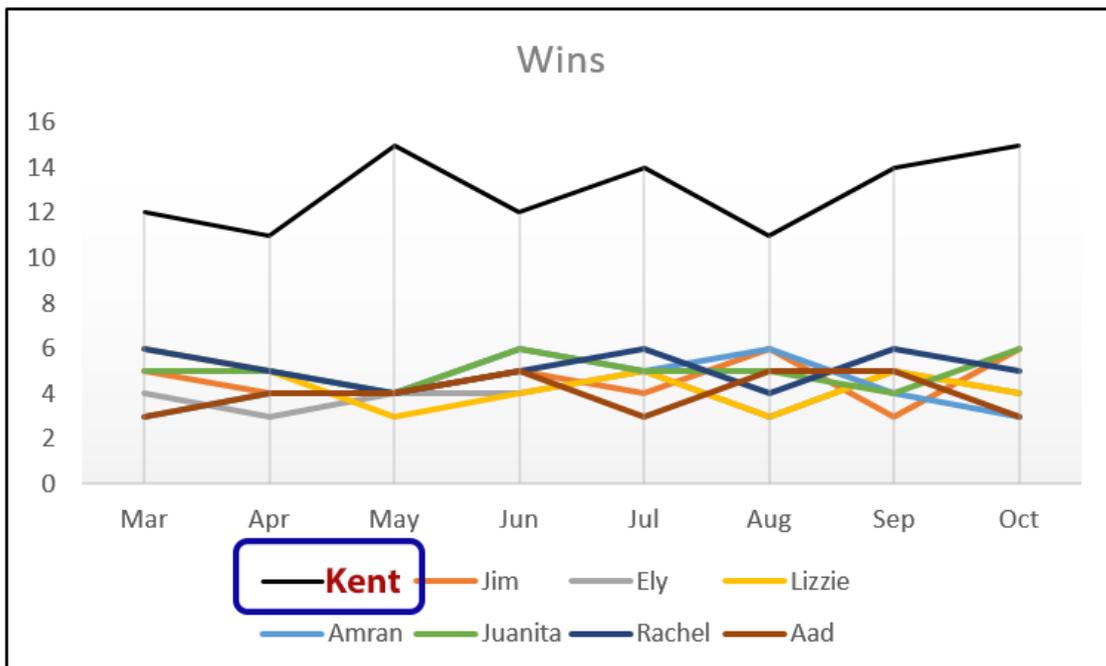
In professional sports, team executives don't make decisions on how good players *say* they are; they make decisions based on the statistics showing what the player produces.

When you define expectations by using outputs, you can find a way to measure the outputs. Ideally, you'll want two types of measurements:

- Outputs produced (best presented as opportunities to produce the output vs. times the output was successfully produced).
- Business results that improved because of your production of outputs. For a more in depth discussion of this, go to ltd-academy.com and research *Relevant Business Results*.

Why is it so important to have measurement? So you can build a chart like the one below.

There are those that talk a good game, and those that prove they're good.



Why It's Hard to Create Clear Expectations

I was once accused of being a poor employee because someone saw me standing outside staring at traffic. That person didn't understand that I had left my desk, where I was struggling to think, and had gone to another environment to think better.

After a short time, I had returned to my desk and processed the new thoughts I'd received while outside. I wasn't a poor employee, just misunderstood by someone who thought work only happened when someone was performing an action, such as typing at a computer. That's an example of why we have a hard time creating expectations.

3 Reasons We Struggle When Creating Expectations





Actions

- Reason:

Supervisors often focus on actions because it's easy to observe them. It doesn't take much time or effort to see you're in your cubicle using your computer. It takes a lot more effort to determine your output. In my story above, I was being judged based on the old habit of observing action, not by my outputs.

- Problem:
There is rarely one right way to produce an output; you and your supervisor could disagree forever on which is best. Also, I've seen peers who always talked about being busy but never produced visible results. Maybe you've known someone like that too.



Goals

- Reason:

We're told to focus on goals. Many performance evaluation programs and corporate initiatives center on achievement of goals.

- Problem:
Goals end up being highly subjective. By the time you reach the date your goal should be achieved, the world has changed. Then you're left discussing what the goal should have been. Also, there's a big difference between missing a goal by a mile and by a hair's breadth—but on paper they both look like failure-to-meet-the-goal.



Tasks

- Reason:

Tasks are small parts of a larger performance. They're easy to find and define.

- Problem

Though important, too much focus on discrete task leads to neglect of the real need—the production of the output while working within the culture of the organization and in concert your coworkers. It matters whether you work well with others, follow processes, and contribute well to the larger performance—the output.



Creating Those Clear Expectations

Questions are great things. A good question gives you the information you need for success. To create those clear expectations, you need to ask the *right* questions. That's why you're getting the right questions in this section.

On page 7 you'll find a set of questions to discuss with your supervisor that will lead to clear expectations. You'll notice a focus on a competent person. It's easier to figure out expectations by looking at what the most competent employee produces as outputs. There's a reason they're considered the most competent.

Here's a bonus.

You can go to the [Lean Talent Development Academy website](#) and find example nouns, criteria, and measurements. You'll find them labeled as *Example Value-Added Outputs*.

When you write your expectations, you'll be creating simple Value-Added Outputs, and you'll be on the way to having a more enjoyable career, because you and your supervisor now agree on what's expected of you as an employee.

It's our natural tendency to focus on actions, goals, or tasks, so don't expect to create expectations in one discussion. You and your supervisor may need multiple meetings to determine them. Everyone is unique. No job description applies to everyone, even to two people doing the same job.

Discussion Questions for Clarifying Expectations

Let's first explore what competence looks like.

1. What would be proof that I was the most competent person in my job?

Now let's identify an output that, when you do it well, provides value to the company and to yourself. The next three questions help you identify that output. If you feel you have one or two more outputs, use these same questions to identify the additional outputs.

2. What is a finished output that I produce that would prove my competence?
 - An output can always be described using a noun, since it's a singular product.
 - An output is not an action or process, but could be the result of actions or processes.
 - An output will always have criteria to show when it counts (see question 3).
3. For the output discussed in question 2, what are the criteria that describe how that output looks when done by the most competent employee? Criteria should:
 - **Clarify when it counts.** We have agreement on the evidence that proves the output has been completed.
 - **Define efficiency.** We identify whether speed, quality, accuracy, or a combination of these elements is important.
 - **Provide a challenge.** Write criteria that can only be consistently achieved by the most competent. The best expectations challenge you to keep improving. Challenging criteria define how to improve to provide value to yourself and the company.
4. Which metrics will show results related to the output?
 - One metric should focus on the number of times the output was successfully produced.
 - Another helpful metric is one that changes based on the number and/or quality of outputs produced.



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