Motivating employees through realistic deadlines - 4 Do's

Without deadlines, employees flounder. They can't be aware of the urgency or priorities of a project unless their supervisors tell them.

Following are four tips on motivating employees by setting realistic deadlines:

1. Do be specific

Name the target day and time. And mean what you say. If you ask for completion "next week," don't complain on Friday that you really needed it on Wednesday.

2. Do clarify priorities

Let people know if this assignment takes precedence over any other projects they're working on now. Avoid the old, favorite deadline "ASAP," which usually translates in an employee's mind as "whenever it gets done."

3. Don't set false deadlines

Setting a deadline earlier than necessary (because you don't trust your employees to meet the real deadline) creates more problems than it solves.

Your staff will soon learn that's how you operate and will assume there's always air in the schedule. As a result, they'll always miss that first deadline, just as you knew they would.

4. Do establish an update schedule

The best-laid plans can go astray, and so can deadlines. You'll minimize the chance of this occurring by setting up a progress report schedule when you assign the project. This is especially important for long-term projects.