

Performance Expectations

“Familiarity breeds contempt” is one of those common expressions that appear to be a Proverb but fall well short of spiritual insight.

The phrase tends to indicate that the more we are around someone, the more likely it is we will miss fresh and valuable experiences from the relationship. “I know you. I know how you will respond.”

I’d like to amend the expression and offer a cautionary exhortation. Expectation breeds contempt. Sometimes we see only what we expect to see. Many work teams are trapped in the zone of expectancy.

“This is all I am expected to do. I’m supposed to color inside these lines. So that’s what I’ll do. I’ll color and I’ll stay within the lines.”

The opportunity for leadership is to agitate acclimation. We must lead others away from their daily routine. Leaders must reveal artificial boundaries established by their teams and break up the supposed limits.

Effective leaders continue to enlarge the performance arc. We develop our teams through work enrichment. Often, all a leader can see in a worker is a performance boundary. “He can do this, but he can’t do that.”

Leaders must fight the gravitational effect of performance expectations.

It’s not that leaders expect too much. It’s that we expect too little. We must redefine performance limitations. We must not allow our teams to become accustomed to our coloring books.

We cannot allow “performance contempt” to creep into our organization. It has viral properties.