



# The care and feeding of employee egos

## Fostering E-xpectations, G-oals and O-ptions in your workforce

When you hear someone say, “That person’s got quite an ego,” it’s rarely meant as a form of flattery. In fact, it typically carries a lot of negative connotation.

**A** more positive way to think of ego is to look at what it takes to maintain a healthy one. Using the word ego as an acronym, here are three key requirements: E-xpectations, G-oals and O-ptions.

### Expectations

If you want to mess with people’s heads, be fuzzy about what you expect them to do. Then give them a rash of trouble when they fail to meet your expectations. That problem crops up often in the performance review and appraisal process. What starts out at the beginning of the year looking like a clearly defined set of goals and objectives can later become a bone of contention.

The employee and the supervisor discover they had different ideas of what successful completion looks like, and guess who usually wins the argument? Even the best of employees can get bruised egos from that kind of experience. Both people bear responsibility for making the process work, but the supervisor has to take the lead in making sure they are on the same page from the outset.



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### Goals

Remember the classic exchange between Alice and the Cheshire Cat in “Alice’s Adventures in Wonderland”? Alice is wandering around lost. She replies that she really doesn’t know where she’s going, and the cat says, “Then it doesn’t matter which way you go.”

Your ego is in jeopardy if you don’t have clear goals. When it comes to the workplace, employees and supervisors have to make sure that well-defined, meaningful goals are in place if they want to keep people feeling happy, healthy and whole.

### Options

In my book, “Getting to the Heart of Employee Engagement: The Power and Purpose of Imagination and Free Will in the Workplace,” I talk about imagination and free will as the two essential qualities that differentiate human beings from all other living creatures.

When it comes to free will, our capacity to make choices, to do things that aren’t dictated by the program that controls other animals is a forceful driver of people’s attitudes and behaviors. Failing to appreciate that force leads to some flawed notions about human nature in the workplace. The old bromide that people resist change is a classic example.

The fact is, people change all the time. What they resist is being forced to change without having a say in the matter. People hate not having the



control that comes with choices and options. What’s more, they won’t trust anyone who takes that control away from them, and their performance on the job is often subpar when they don’t get it.

That distinction is at the core of a basic misunderstanding about why people supposedly dislike “command and control” cultures. In truth, it’s the command part people hate. When it’s done right, control is just another word for predictability, and employees understand that.

Bottom line, healthy egos are a big part of what makes the business world go ’round. So take the time to make sure employees are clear on their E-xpectations, G-oals and O-ptions if you want to keep them tuned in, turned on and ready to go the extra mile. ●

**Les Landes** is president of Landes & Associates. The firm provides management consulting services in the areas of organizational communication, employee engagement, marketing, public relations and continuous improvement systems. They are the creators of the “ImaginAction System,” a tool for getting employees engaged in systematic continuous improvement. Landes is also the author of multiple articles, as well as a recently published book, “Getting to the Heart of Employee Engagement: The Power and Purpose of Imagination and Free Will in the Workplace.” For more information, visit [www.landesassociates.com](http://www.landesassociates.com).