

CAST:

THE EXEC—a competent, ambitious, hard-working boss who wants his staff and their product to work like clockwork.

MIKE—a staff member who has been getting his reports in late.

ACTION:

EXEC: "Look, Mike, I've told you twice now that your reports are late. I won't have it happen again!"

MIKE: "But it's not my fault. It's . . ."

EXEC: "Look. No more excuses. Just shape up. Can you do the job or can't you? I want those reports on time. That's all!"

MIKE: "Okay. Sorry. You'll have them."

A common encounter. But—read it again. Do you think the Exec has solved the problem? Does he/she know any more now than before? Did he/she help to solve the problem? And do you think Mike, who's still solely responsible for getting the reports done on time, will, or can, truly change what's been happening—permanently?

In order to discover how to effect these outcomes by designing some different methods of communicating, we need to look a little deeper at what's going on:

*Exec:* Needs something and isn't getting it. Typically, he/she has gone about getting it in the shortest route possible—complaining, demanding (or telling), and expecting compliance.

*Mike:* Hears displeasure or criticism. Typically, he defends himself or avoids confrontation by agreeing, though he still hasn't figured out a better way to get his reports in on time.

What's predictable here?

- The Exec will be angry.
- Mike will never say "No."
- Mike's anxiety level will be raised.
- Mike's reports will probably be late again.

In the scenario just described, the Exec must depend on what Mike *says* he'll do, *not* on the Exec himself, not on what he/she can find out and add to solve or change things. This is not a strong position, but one probably headed for more heat and frustration without resolution.

Let's peel back another layer or two. What *else* may be going on underneath the action? What issues are *not* being addressed?