Case Notes

# Chapter 13: Overcoming Obstacles

# Case 13.1: Book Quiz Blues?

## Case Summary

Trey Morgan, an education major, volunteered his time to coach a Book Quiz team of fourth graders. Teams had the responsibility to read 10 books in 10 weeks to prepare for the competition. Trey’s team members were assigned to him, and he decided to make a chart and award students a star for each book they finished reading.

After three weeks passed, one student, Claire, had already finished half of the books. Another student, Shelby, had stopped reading them, calling them “boring,” Marco, had started strong but had not been keeping up, and Garrett, the final team member, was still on his first book.

At the six-week mark, Trey realized that his team had not met the mark. They should have completed at least five books, however, only Claire had met the benchmark. Trey decided to try and give the students a pep talk, however, they did not take kindly to his words, leading to conflict between each other and then also with Trey. When asked my Marco, “Aren’t you going to do something,” Trey was left with a decision to make.

Case Analysis

This case study represents an example of **path-goal leadership** and how Trey Morgan could have used this leadership model to overcome **obstacles** that hinder productivity. In this case, Trey is working with four students, each with their own unique obstacles to complete the task (book reading) that Trey was responsible for ensuring they complete. Trey had the responsibility to assess the student’s ability at some point over the ten-week period and differentiate instruction based on their individual “paths.”

## Sample Answers to Case Questions

*1. Obviously, things are not working out well for Trey and his team. If you were Trey, how would you have proceeded from the beginning to help the team avoid or overcome its obstacles?*

Trey could have approached this situation in a number of different manners. First, Trey could have set clear benchmarks for each week, and followed through with each of the students on a weekly basis instead of simply waiting for the three-week and six-week mark. Also, Trey never bothered to get to know the children and assess and learn their strengths and weaknesses. Each student required a different method and a different approach, which is a key component of education (differentiated instruction). Trey wanted each student to read and learn the same way. Also, when Trey noticed struggles in the beginning, he easily could have contacted the children’s teacher to receive input or advice as to how to proceed.

*2. Based on the seven obstacles discussed in this chapter, identify which obstacles each of the team members (Claire, Shelby, Marco, and Garrett) is facing.*

Claire is facing the obstacle of complex tasks. While the tasks themselves might not be complex, her time to read has been shortened because of her athletic involvement. Combining both tasks has been a challenge for her, and she has been forced to slow down her work effort.

Shelby is struggling from unclear directions. She has started every book that she was supposed to read, but her lack of focus has caused her not to complete any of the readings. Because of this, she may be further along than others overall, but has no tangible products to show for the completion of her work.

Marco suffered from low motivation, after Claire jumped out into an early lead. Because Marco was behind Claire, he lost the desire and the will to continue reading and without receiving a prize for winning (his motivation) he could not focus on completing the books as assigned.

Garrett’s inability to focus could classify his obstacle as simple tasks. Having read the same book for six weeks without a break, this could be construed as a problem for him, and continue to frustrate his progress. Trey needed to use a supportive style with him to encourage his progress, even if it is slower than the others, to get him to continue.

*3. Some of Trey’s team members seem to lack motivation. Based on expectancy theory, how could Trey help his team members feel competent, get what they expect, and value what they do?*

Expectancy theory suggests that people will be more highly motivated when the effort they put into a task leads to an expected outcome that they value.

Trey could help his team members feel competent by acknowledging and rewarding their progress throughout the ten-week period, not just for completion. As the four students had completed each of their books or progressed through the books (for Garrett, perhaps on a chapter-by-chapter basis), rewards and acknowledgment could have been given for progress.

Trey could help his team members get what they expect by setting achievable goals for each of the students based on their own individual abilities. By assessing the capabilities of each student in advance, Trey could have set goals that were more achievable than simple completion.

Trey could help his team members value what they do by helping them to value reading both intrinsically and extrinsically. This case study documented the “rewards aspect” of this contest, but what about the lifelong benefits and enjoyment that come from reading. If Trey was excited about the books, maybe his team would be excited about them as well.

*4. Based on how his team is feeling and doing, identify three specific things Trey could do to help his students.*

The first thing Trey needs to do is motivate his team to let them know they can still do well. By showing them that he is supportive and still believes in them, his team might be able to at least finish some of the books by the targeted completion date.

Next, Trey may want to consider finding a way to motivate the four children based on the content of the books. Trey could read the books himself and introduce them in a way that makes them exciting and interesting to the children. Lack of motivation and focus appear to be the two main problems in this case, and by Trey learning the material and teaching it to the students, it might be more exciting and motivating for them.

Finally, Trey needs to differentiate strategy with each child individually. He needs to meet with Marco and tell him to keep reading and excite him on the remaining books. He needs to encourage Garrett to continue reading and even if he can’t complete all ten books in four weeks (very unlikely) at least complete a few of them, and Trey needs to work directly with Garett. With Claire, she only has to finish one book a week, by helping her to take her time and focus, she should be able to complete the reading. For Shelby, motivating her to actually complete her first book might be able to drive her to complete the remainder of the books by the deadline.