



# How to Encourage People through Disappointment

What if everyone gets an “A” for effort but the results aren’t there? Here are six ways to encourage your team while you work on your recovery strategy.

By Karin Hurt & David Dye

It’s easy to lead when your team is on fire with fantastic results. You’re happy. Your team is happy. But even the best leaders face tricky circumstances when, despite great plans, long hours, and hard work, the results aren’t there. Here’s what to do when you and your team members face discouragement.

## 1. Acknowledge the Stress

If you’ve got people who really care, failure means big-time stress. Sometimes what your team needs first is a bit of compassion.

Instead of berating them for not delivering, try this: “I know how stressed you are right now. The results are disappointing. But we have a great plan, and you’re doing the right things. We’ll figure out if there’s anything we can do differently next time. But for now, relax, take some deep breaths, and don’t let the stress get you down.”

## 2. Foster Accountability

When people are disappointed, they often look for someone to blame. But finger-pointing just wastes emotional energy. Help people own what they can and stop wishing things were different. Align them around what *is* in their control, and ask “How can we?” questions.

## 3. Stay Focused on the Game, Not the Score

When your results are disappointing, it’s tempting to make the conversation about the numbers. But talking about numbers doesn’t change them, behaviors do.

“What processes are more habit than value?”

“Ask four simple questions.”

Help your team reflect on the wins. What behaviors *are* working? What best practices move the needle? How can you adapt those best practices to work in other contexts?

Work to identify the critical few behaviors that will have the biggest impact – and have those behaviors at the center of every conversation.

## 4. Own the U.G.L.Y.

A good technique for getting past discouragement is the “own the U.G.L.Y.” exercise. Ask four simple questions:

**U – What are we *Underestimating*?** New technology? Risk? The destruction that the new manager is doing to our culture? The opportunity that we “don’t have time for”?

**G – What’s *Gotta Go*?** What are we doing now that doesn’t make sense anymore? What processes are more habit than value? What meetings are wasting our time? What’s gotta go for us to be remarkable?

**L – Where are we  *Losing*?** Where are we still underperforming despite our best efforts? Why? Who’s doing it better? How?


**Y – Where are we missing the “Yes”?** What must we say “Yes” to? What new opportunities are yearning for our attention? Where must we invest more deeply?

Teams admire leaders who “own the ugly.” Have the confidence and humility to go there – to start the conversation, and then listen deeply to the solutions.

## 5. Celebrate Progress

When you're far away from your goal, it can feel silly to celebrate anything, but that may be exactly what people need in order to regain their mojo. Setting milestone goals and incremental wins can inspire renewed confidence.

## 6. Keep Perspective

Resilience research shows that people are more likely to recover if they understand that the setback isn't pervasive, it's just one aspect of their life. Just because you didn't make your goal doesn't mean your whole life is a wreck. Help your team keep perspective on what matters most in their lives. 

---

*Karin Hurt and David Dye help leaders achieve breakthrough results without losing their soul. They are keynote leadership speakers, trainers, and the award-winning authors of Winning Well: A Manager's Guide to Getting Results Without Losing Your Soul and Courageous Cultures. Karin is a top leadership consultant and CEO of Let's Grow Leaders (letsgrowleaders.com), their leadership training and consulting firm. David Dye is president of Let's Grow Leaders.*

## Keep Up the Momentum

Keep people's energy and passion ignited with articles like these at [NonprofitWorld.org](https://www.nonprofitworld.org):

**Strategies to Reboot & Refresh** (Vol. 40, No. 3)

**The Key to Building Productive Teams** (Vol. 21, No. 4)

**When Employees Disappoint: How Effective Leaders Respond** (Vol. 40, No. 1)

**How to Tap into Purpose to Motivate People** (Vol. 38, No. 2)

**What Not to Do and How Not to Do It** (Vol. 19, No. 6)

**Grounded Visioning: A Quick Way to Create Shared Visions** (Vol. 26, No. 4)

**Do You Know Where Your Goals Are?** (Vol. 26, No. 5)

**Overcome People's Resistance with These Steps** (Vol. 38, No. 3)

**Will & Vision: Keys to Advancing Your Organization** (Vol. 26, No. 2)

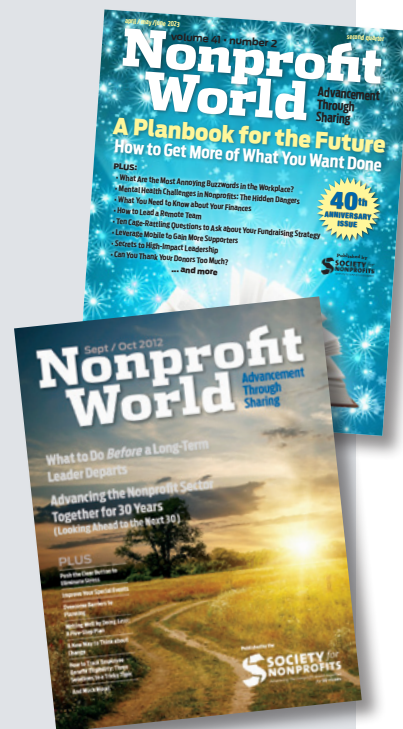
**How to Coach People through Stress: Use Reflective Inquiry for Best Results** (Vol. 38, No. 4)

**Be a Better Leader by Being a Careful Listener** (Vol. 37, No. 1)

## Enjoy Reading NONPROFIT WORLD ?

Here are more benefits of membership in the Society for Nonprofits

- **12 issues of Nonprofit World Funding Alert**, providing monthly updates on grant and funding opportunities.
- **Membership in GrantStation**, with instant access to over 5,500 grantmakers via the Find-a-Funder searchable database.
- **Complete access to over 1,200 printer-ready management articles**, searchable by author, key word, or subject.
- **Reduced enrollment fees** from the Learning Institute for the Society's Certificate Series of educational programs.
- **Free job postings** on our [NonprofitCareers.org](https://www.nonprofitcareers.org) job site.



For more information, visit: [NonprofitWorld.org](https://www.nonprofitworld.org)