

Creating High Performance Employees: No Time to Wait!

Part 1 of 2

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Do you and your company's management hope that great change will emerge from the sub-par employee? Are you in the "wait and see" mode, praying that the employee either magically improves or leaves the company? Does real change occur at the end of the performance rainbow - or are you kicking yourself after six months (or longer) of no change in employee behavior?

Set Clear Expectations

Many employees who are not performing do not know what is expected of them from their direct supervisor. They wonder how their performance fits into the bigger picture, unsure of the relevance of their day to day function in the overarching mission.

Sometimes they see corporate values being violated in front of them and find it hard to believe the talk because many are not walking the walk. Gallup research has told us for years that people quit managers/supervisors, not companies. Recent research has shown that 43% of employee satisfaction is directly attributed to the relationship an employee has with his/her manager.

"Cooperation" is demonstrated by regular interactions (meetings, phone calls, emails) and documented decisions that employees make with others. Outside observers (preferably you or other managers) will report seeing these interactions on a consistent basis using behaviors such as a pleasant voice tone, face to face communication whenever possible (watch out for the email-only people) and respectful words of courtesy appropriate to the culture (please and thank you go along way). People return phone calls in a timely way and they learn to disagree in a positive way.

"Communication skills" mean oral, written and non-verbal. Non-verbal communications are 75% of an interaction. We expect our employees to face each other when discussing an issue (direct eye contact is good, but be careful of cultural differences). Do not accept rolling the eyes and walking away, staring at the floor and mumbling, or deep sighs and the proverbial "whatever" to mean acceptance. Managing conflict is required for organizations to grow and mature.

Practice Good Feedback:

- "I notice" is a better way to start critical feedback because it does not automatically put people on the defensive. "Why did you do that..." tends to start the interaction off with defensive blaming.
- Consider taking a moment to prepare yourself (and calm down) and your thoughts for the tough talk.
- Focus on the behaviors that are causing individual, group and organizational stress.
- Connect the desired behaviors to the stated goals and help define the employee's role in making them come true.
- Ask the employee to come up with solutions and don't feel compelled to solve all of the problems. When your team is actively involved in building solutions there is a better chance for long term success.

Remember to stay positive throughout a performance discussion and know that it usually takes regular and consistent feedback to change behavior. Don't sit back and "wait and see" how it will turn out, be an active participant and you will reap good will on your team.

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