HOW TO CREATE HIGH PERFORMANCE EMPLOYEES

By Jim Kimberly

What do you do with an employee whose performance is sub-par? Many of us use the "wait and see" management strategy to see if the employee will improve magically on his or her own. We hope the struggling employee can figure out what he or she is doing wrong, turn things around and get in tune with our business objectives without any intervention from managers or supervisors.

The wait and see strategy typically delivers one result: the employee leaves the company. Either he or she is fired for not performing up to standard, or leaves the company in search of a work environment that is more supportive.

It's not enough to leave employees to their own devices to figure out how to do a good job. Companies need to take an active role in creating high performance employees by setting clear expectations and practicing good feedback.

Establish Performance Expectations

Most companies clearly communicate performance goals in terms of job output, such as the number of widgets assembled or the number of sales closed. Unfortunately, not as many companies address the less tangible attributes of a top performing employee, such as communication skills and cooperation with other employees. The ability to communicate clearly and get along with others is essential for effective performance.

Discuss your expectations for both productivity and interpersonal interactions, then be prepared to provide constructive feedback if expectations are not met.

Provide Constructive Feedback

It takes regular and consistent feedback to change behavior. Don't sit back and wait and see if an employee will finally "get it".

Establish a positive relationship –Show appreciation, get to know employees personally and understand what motivates them. Building a relationship is critical for you to make deposits into the "trust" bank of employee goodwill. This becomes the foundational support on which critical feedback stands.

Observe behavior – Be prepared to notice specific examples of employee behaviors (effective and not so effective) in the workplace. Your "radar" needs to be up!

Prepare before giving feedback – Take a few minutes to think through what you want to say and how you will say it. A few minutes here may help you begin with the right words and not get the employee on the defensive.

State your intention to help – If your intentions are to criticize, don't bother with the feedback because the employee won't hear it.

Share your perceptions of behaviors and their organizational impact – Describe your views and how it affects you, customers and co-workers.

Ask questions and create dialogue - Adopt an attitude of "inquiry" vs. giving a "soliloquy" and you might learn more about the situation. Don't assume your view is the gospel . Instead, have a dialogue about the situation.

Solicit suggestions for improvement before stating your ideas – Employee ideas tend to get implemented faster and with more buy-in than ideas that come down from management. Welcome ideas from everyone at the company.

Agree on the action plan – Who will do what by when? Make sure that agreements and performance expectations are clear. Consider sending a memo that confirms the action plan so no misunderstandings arise.

Offer support –Be prepared to offer and deliver support when needed.

Follow up – This step is often forgotten because we lose track of the action plan. Consult your notes and set up regular weekly check-in times.

A wait and see approach to improving employee performance may work in some instances, but it will be a slow, difficult and frustrating process. Supporting high performance in your employees demands your dialogue and feedback, so start planning those performance discussions today!

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