



THE PURSUIT OF PEAK PERFORMANCE

Performance management is a two-way conversation between employee and supervisor



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The challenge for many executives is how to make ordinary people do extraordinary things. You have a workforce, and they do a good job. So, how can you increase their productivity? Performance management may be your solution.

Performance management consists of four major components: a performance plan, constructive feedback, employee development and performance appraisal. If your company is like most, the structure of a performance management process would be a welcome addition. Here is an overview of the components:

PERFORMANCE PLAN

In many organizations, the performance plan is the disparate pieces of paperwork that new hires are given, and often the paperwork is spread between human resources and the supervisor. Consider creating a new-hire job packet that includes detailed job description, clearly written annual performance goals for the position, an outline of the performance review process and any supporting materials.

I have found that it is also helpful to include a few management articles to set a positive tone with new employees. My two favorites are from Harvard Business Review: "Managing Your Boss" by John Gabarro and John Kotter and "Managing Oneself" by Peter Drucker. These classics are short, easy to read and provide a great foundation for conversations about working relationships and communication styles between new hires and their supervisors. You can request reprints online at custserv@hbsp.harvard.edu.

CONSTRUCTIVE FEEDBACK

Constructive feedback is based on employee performance of duties outlined in their job description and their progress towards attaining annual performance goals. This feedback should be ongoing and provided to employees both orally and in writing on a regular basis. When providing constructive feedback, give the rationale for your comments, and deliver the feedback as if you were giving it to yourself. Craft your words as you would want to receive them. Then ask for what you gave — feedback. How did the employee receive your comments? With these considerations, constructive feedback can effectively influence employee productivity and performance.

EMPLOYEE DEVELOPMENT

Employee development is often determined as part of the constructive feedback process and can be used to enhance existing skills or to address deficiencies that have been identified. Specific training or classes may be identified for the employee, or a performance coach can be assigned. Coaches study the environment where the employee works, shadow the employee and conduct one-on-one confidential sessions to support the employee in acquiring new skills or behaviors. Some companies use outside firms for coaching, while others contract with colleges or universities to train a cadre of employees to assume this role. Coaches can be used to facilitate the transfer of employees to new departments, introduction of new processes and procedures or to remediate performance deficiencies.

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL

The appraisal should focus on productivity, quality of work, dependability and the employee's overall contribution to the organization. It is important to train all managers and executives who will be conducting performance appraisals to ensure objectivity and continuity of evaluations throughout your organization. Performance appraisal training should focus on how to give constructive criticism, provide concrete and specific examples of good performance and strategies for giving constructive feedback. Nothing is more frustrating to an employee than to observe drastic differences in evaluation styles among supervisors. Creation of common standards and procedures can alleviate these disparities.

The pursuit of peak performance is a two-way conversation between an employee and their

supervisor. It is up to the CEO to systematize the performance management process and actively engage employees when they are hired. Have you laid the groundwork for peak performance in your organization?

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