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Performance Management
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Preface

Whether you are a manager yourself or a member of staff being managed you will no doubt come face to face with the performance management process!

Performance Management, as the name suggests, is often referred to as the ongoing activity of managing, and hopefully improving the performance of staff. It consists of regular meetings where performance is discussed, objectives are set, action plans are formulated and development needs identified.

In this textbook you'll understand what performance management is all about and how to manage this process properly so you keep your top performers motivated as well as improving the performance of all of your other staff.

Sean McPheat, the Founder and Managing Director of management development specialists, MTD Training is the author of this publication. Sean has been featured on CNN, BBC, ITV, on numerous radio stations and has contributed to many newspapers. He's been featured in over 250 different publications as a thought leader within the management development and training industry.

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1. Introduction

Performance management involves many roles. You must be a communicator, a leader, a role model, and a collaborator. Each individual member of the team should understand exactly what their responsibilities and expectations are, and as their supervisor, you should work to help them reach those goals.

Some people find performance management to be a difficult role to play. Some people in particular have difficulty when it comes to evaluating performance. But when it's done well, performance management is about partnership and motivation. If it's done from this perspective, there is nothing to be uncomfortable about. When this perspective is shared with your employees and they learn to see it that way, performance management becomes a powerful tool that helps your team to become more successful.

> One of the major roles of a supervisor is to manage the performance of the team and of each individual team member. Although some people find performance management to be difficult or unpleasant, but when it is done well, it is about partnership and motivation.

1.1 Benefits of Performance Management

Before we look at specific ways of managing performance in the following chapters, let's make sure the benefits of performance management are clear:

- When roles and responsibilities are clear, motivation is increased. If your team members know what they are supposed to be doing, there is no loss of motion due to confusion or uncertainty. Instead, a motivated individual will be in action, and a team full of motivated individuals will feed off of each other and help keep that motivation going.

- When expectations are clear, employees are more likely to take ownership of their work and to be committed to the expected outcomes. They will be more likely to be willing to take risks, to put in extra effort, and to view their own role as that of a partnership with you and with the rest of the team.

- When goals are clear and being pursued, your team members each will be able to contribute to team effectiveness. Without performance management, a team can't be expected to be effective. Without it, they can be expected to flounder.

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- Performance management also helps you to develop your team members. You can use it to stretch their capabilities, to challenge them to step outside of their comfort zone. Doing so will provide opportunities for individual growth, which in turn will help to fuel their enthusiasm for their job.

- Helping them to grow and develop will help you to progress the individuals through the company. You can be building on strengths that the company needs – both in your division and in other areas.

- A solid, well-formed performance management process gives you a powerful tool for addressing poor performance issues, should they arise. If you and your employee have agreed upon what their duties and responsibilities are, then you have something to refer to when they are not holding up their end of the agreement.

These benefits have all been listed from the point of view of the supervisor. But just as important is finding a way to communicate the benefits of performance management to your employees. What are some of the benefits for the employee of well-structured and well-implemented performance management process?

> The benefits above are from the point of view of the coach. But there are also benefits for the employee – and your job is to communicate these benefits to your team.

- Security in knowing they are doing the job they way you want it done

- A clear understanding of what you expect and what the corresponding rewards or consequences will be

- A framework for gauging their own performance

- A continuing conversation with you regarding how to improve their skills and performance

- Knowing that they have the ability to determine their own success by following the performance plan you have set in place

These benefits are fully attainable for your team members – provided you have laid the foundation of a fair, consistent, clear, and achievable performance management plan. What would you need to hear or see from your own coach in order to see performance management and performance evaluation as benefits in your own job performance? Or another way of asking yourself this question is to consider what actions from your own supervisor would ruin the possibility that you could see the benefits of the process? Your actions (or lack thereof) will determine the attitude that your team members have towards the performance management process.

> These benefits are attainable for your team when you lay the foundation of a fair, consistent, clear, and achievable performance management plan.

First, maintain consistency. Once you set performance targets, you need to act and evaluate according to them. If you tell your employees that you expect one thing but then evaluate them based on something else, your employees will lose trust in you as their supervisor and in the validity of your performance management process. Certainly, there are times when the nature of the job or the goals of the organization may shift, requiring that you need to adjust performance targets. However, the reason for these changes should be made clear – and should remain as consistent as possible in the future.

> Maintain consistency. The targets you set for your team should be the same performance expectations that you use to evaluate them.

Next, be sure to follow-through on your performance management process. If you tell your team that you will have quarterly performance evaluations, then be sure you have them. If you have as a goal for your employee that they learn a new skill, be sure that you provide them with the necessary training or resources. If you don't take your plan seriously and follow-through on what you said you would do, then you can't expect your employees to do so either.

> Follow-through on your performance management process. If you don't stick to it, you can't expect your team to do so.

If your attitude towards performance management is one that focuses on the benefits and your actions mirror that attitude, then you employees will learn to appreciate the process. They will understand that performance management isn't about punishment or criticism – it's about growth, productivity, and success as a team.

What if you aren't certain exactly how to set up a performance management process? We'll look at some specific coaching and development models in the following chapters, but before you can supervise or coach anyone in their role, you need to lay the foundation for successful supervising by being sure that you understand exactly what you should be expecting.

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1.2 Laying the Foundation for Successful Performance Management

When you become a supervisor, unless you are leading an entirely new division or team, there will probably be some form of performance management program in existence. It might seem easy and productive to simply enact what has been done before. We are all so pressured for time on the job that doing something like reviewing the basics of your performance management process may easily slip to the back burner.

But look back a moment at the benefits we discussed in the last section. The only way for you to be certain that you and your team will experience those benefits is to review the existing process and make sure that it is set up as well as possible. Does the current system foster an environment of partnership and development, or does it perpetuate a negative perception of what performance management means? By taking the time to review the foundations of your performance management process, you will be in an excellent position for reaping all of the possible benefits.

Assuming you're convinced of the need to do so, how do you ensure that you have a strong foundation for your performance management process? It requires a series of steps, starting with evaluating the job itself. You can't define your expectations for your employees until you are certain that you know what those expectations should be. We'll look at how to do this in the next chapter.

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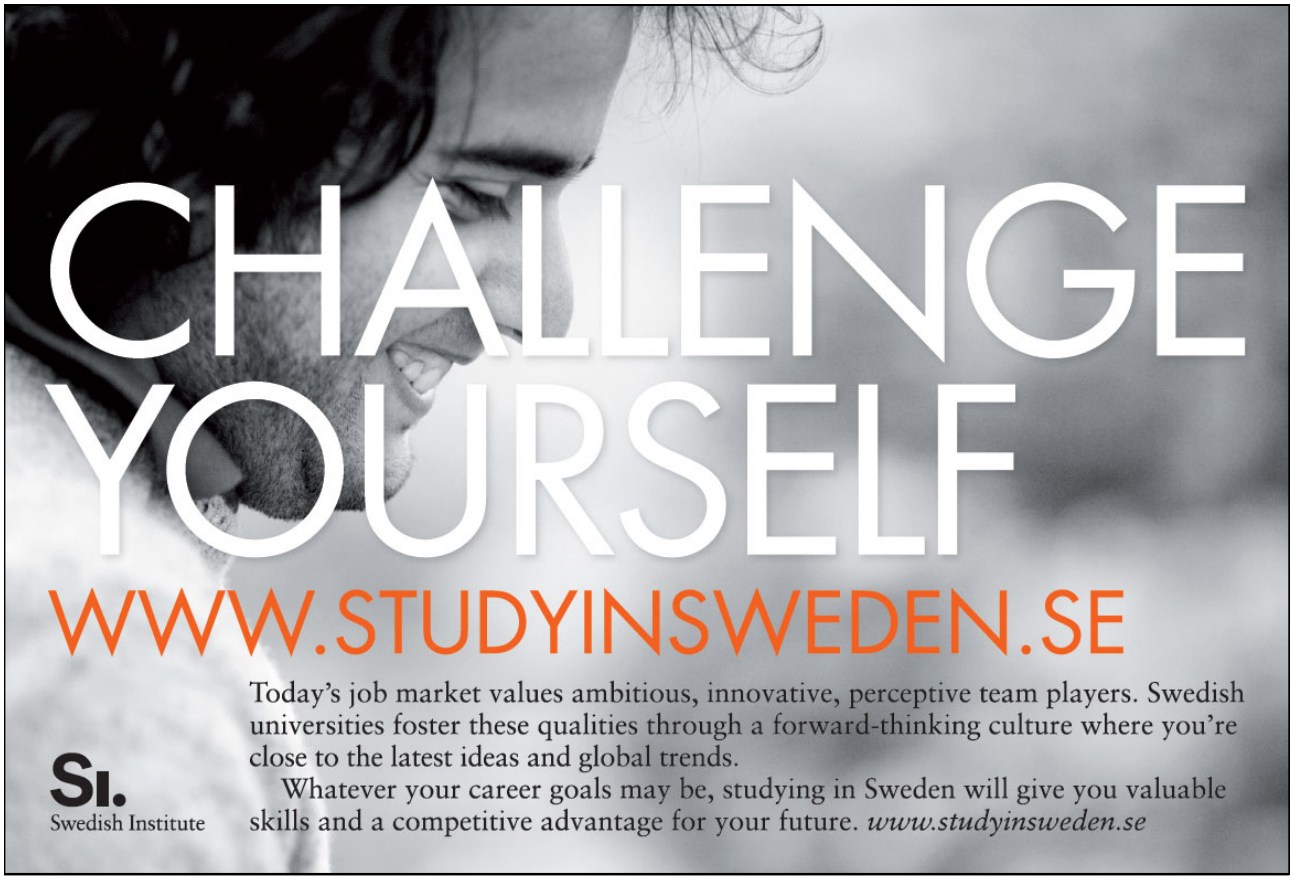

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2. Laying the Foundation for Effective Performance Management

2.1 Introduction

Imagine for a moment that you have to hire someone for one of the positions on your team. What would the first step be? Ideally, you would review the job itself, including the competencies and skills that are necessary. When you have this information, then you can begin to determine how you would evaluate the person performing those skills. You may already have a full team, but evaluating performance should still start with the job itself, not the person in the position. That's the only way you can be objective in evaluating performance across several people – the job specifics become your performance gauge. Here are some tips to help you get started:

- Define the purpose of the job, the duties, and the responsibilities. Be sure that you can clearly identify how your employees will be measured on each of those aspects of their performance. Clearly define what is expected and what they are supposed to achieve.

- Review the responsibilities of current team members or of similar positions in other areas of the organization. How and what are they doing in the job?

- Does your organization have a job description for the position? How closely does it match what the job actually entails? Does it need to be updated?

- Research job descriptions online of similar positions – both inside your organization and in your competition's company. What information can you take from those descriptions to help you update yours?

- As you look at the job and the required functions, be certain that you are thinking about the role itself – and not the person who might currently be in the role. You should be considering what you need the position to do – not the current employees and whether or not they can do those things at this moment. Decide what the most important outcomes or results are that you need from that position.

Once you have completed this prep work, you should know what you need to expect from the position. Now you need to determine how you will coach your team members in order to meet those expectations.

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In later chapters, we will look at specific models for coaching and performance management for both individuals and teams. Yet whether you will choose one of those models or not, there are some basic steps that should be included in any performance management process. These will help ensure that your coaching leads to the outcomes you desire, that your team is able to see the benefits of the process, and that you are able to help them grow as you go.

2.2 Goal Setting

Goal setting is a powerful tool that can be used to motivate and challenge employees or yourself. Knowing that you have achieved a goal gives you a sense of accomplishment and gives you a way to keep track of what you have completed in the work place. It is also key in performance management because it gives you a way to measure performance that is objective and clear.

> Goal setting can be used in every type of work place and with every level of employee.

However, there is a right way and a wrong way to set goals. Well set goals are clear and you can objectively determine whether or not the goal has been reached. Poorly set goals are not clear and you can't necessarily tell what it will look like once the goal has been achieved. The result is frustration and lack of effectiveness. We'll now look at two methods for goal setting that you can use in performance management.

2.2.1. Locke and Latham's Goal Setting Theory

Dr. Edwin Locke published his theory on goal setting in 1968 in an article called "Toward a Theory of Task Motivation and Incentives." His theory was that employees were motivated by having a goal to work towards and that reaching that goal improved work performance overall. He showed that people work better when their goals are specific and challenging rather than vague and easy. For example, telling someone to 'improve customer service' is not specific. You might know what it means, but will the employee interpret it the same way? Instead, the goal should be clear, such as 'reduce customer complaints by 50% over a five month period.'

In 1990, Locke and Dr. Gary Latham published "A Theory of Goal Setting and Task Performance" in which they identified five principles that were important in setting goals that will motivate others. These principles are:

- Clarity
- Challenge
- Commitment

- Feedback
- Task complexity

We'll now look at each of these principles individually.

Clarity

A clear goal is one that can be measured and leaves no room for misunderstanding. Goals should be very explicit regarding what behavior is desired and will be rewarded. Look at the goals listed in Figure 1below to help you understand how to be clearer when setting goals. Continue to ask yourself the question, 'What will it look like if the goal is completed?' The answer to the question will help you identify clear goals.

> A clear goal is one that can be measured and leaves no room for misunderstanding.

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Figure 1: Examples of Clear Goals

Challenge

What would give you a greater sense of accomplishment: achieving an easy goal or achieving one that was a real challenge? We are motivated by the reward that we believe we will receive for completing tasks. So if we know that a goal is a challenge and is also perceived as such by those that assigned it to us, we are more likely to be motivated to achieve it.

Of course, there is a balance to be struck with this principle. A goal should be challenging, but must still be achievable. If I don't believe that I can meet a goal that you've given to me, I might not even be motivated to make an attempt. I will dread the goal rather than be motivated by it. You should also be sure that you have identified rewards that are appropriate for the achievement of challenging goals versus normal expectations. By positively rewarding the achievement of challenging goals, you encourage not just the achieving employee, but those other employees who witnessed the reward that was given for the achievement.

We are motivated by the reward we believe we will receive for completing tasks.

Commitment

In order for goals to be effective, they need to be agreed upon. The goal should be in line with the general, established expectations that you have had for the employee in the past. The employee and employer must both be committed to using the resources needed to complete the goal and should also agree on what the reward will be. This takes more time and energy on both parts, but it prevents an end result where the employee didn't have what he or she needed to have in order to be successful, or where the employer is frustrated by the employee's distaste for pursuing the goal.

The employee and employer must both be committed to using the resources needed to complete the goal.

This doesn't mean that you have to get an employee's absolute agreement to every goal that you set for them before setting it. But it does help to gain general agreement if the employee is involved in setting the goals. Allow them to participate in the conversation about what is needed in order to complete the goal, how much time it will take, and any other ways that you can let them participate in decision making about their performance.

You could also ask employees to create their own goals for themselves and then discuss them as a team. You might not be aware that someone wants to improve their skills in a certain area or learn more about a specific process. Letting them take on something that they want to learn and feel challenged by will give them more motivation to do the needed work to achieve their other goals as well.

Feedback

Goal setting is not going to be effective if there is not an opportunity for feedback. What if the person is halfway to completing the goal but they have a question? What if you suspect that the person is going about the process of completing the goal in the wrong way? Feedback is a chance to correct or clarify before the goal has been reached.

Ideally, feedback is a type of progress reporting. It gives the supervisor the chance to clarify expectations and to adjust the level of difficulty of the goal if it seems it's too hard or too easy. For the employee, it offers a chance to make sure they are meeting their supervisor's expectations and to get recognition for what they have achieved up to this point. When the goal has been reached, you can also conduct a formal feedback session so that you can discuss what went well and what could use improvement in the future.

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Task Complexity

The final principle in Locke and Latham's goal setting theory is related to the level of complexity of the assigned task. When a role is complex or highly technical, the person in that role is often already highly motivated or else they wouldn't have reached that level in their organization. However, even the most motivated person can become discouraged if the complexity of the task and the time it would take to complete it wasn't fully understood. Projects can have the tendency to reveal themselves as being more complex after they have begun, so both the employee and supervisor need to be in communication about how involved a task has become.

> Even the most motivated person can become discouraged if the complexity of the task wasn't fully understood.

In complex or technical work environments, it's important to make sure that the person has enough time to reach the goal. Unreasonable time expectations will drive a person to overwhelm themselves with work and become less effective as the stress level increases. You may also have to take into account the time necessary to allow for a learning curve or to ramp up their existing skills.

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2.2.2 S.M.A.R.T. Goals

In goal setting, there is one method that has stood the test of time. Although there have been variations to what the acronym stands for over time, the main definition of a SMART goal is one that is:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Attainable
- Realistic
- Timely

Specific

When a goal is specific, then you have clearly identified what it is that you expect to be accomplished. If you can't say specifically what you want to achieve, then how can you expect yourself or a subordinate to be able to achieve it? A specific goal will answer the questions:

- Who? Who is taking action or is affected?
- What? What is the result I want to achieve?
- Where? Is there a specific location?
- When? When do I want to complete this goal?
- Which? Are there restraints or requirements that have to be met?
- Why? Why is this important? What specifically is the benefit of achieving this goal?

For example, let's say that you want your employee to improve in customer relations. That's not specific enough. If you answer the questions above, however, it becomes much more specific:

- Who – customers whose accounts I am assigned to (currently 750)
- What – I want to be the person that my customers think of first when they need to talk to someone about internet technology. I will know this is happening when I receive at least 20% more inbound customer calls each month. I will email and then call all 750 customers to re-introduce myself and our services.

- Where – In the five states where I currently have customers.
- When – Within six months.
- Which – Starting with customers that I haven't heard from in more than a year.
- Why – To increase sales, reduce customer complaints, and increase customer satisfaction.

Measurable

Each goal that you set for employees should be measurable so that you have a means of ascertaining how far along the employee is in reaching the goal as well as when the goal will be complete. If you have a measure for an entire project, as in our example above of reaching 750 customers, then you can also determine how much of an employee's daily work load should be dedicated to achieving the goal. This will help you break your goals down for use in day-to-day performance management.

So, for our example above, 750 customers need to be emailed and then called in enough time that we see a 20% increase in the amount of inbound calls within six months. Of course, that means that your employee(s) should complete outgoing contacts as soon as possible in order to allow time for the customers to respond. Let's assume that your employee(s) can complete 50 emails in a day in addition to maintaining normal customer service. Then we know that you can email everyone in 15 workdays or three weeks. But, you might not want to wait three weeks between emailing and calling. So let's say you decide to alternate emailing and calling.

In the first week, you decide to only email 100 people. The second week, you call those 100 people. Then you alternate doing the same thing over the following weeks until you have completed your list. Not only do you now have a measurable goal, but you've determined the work that needs to take place in order to achieve that goal and how you need to implement that work into our regular routine so that we have the best chance of success.

To find the measures for any goal, ask the questions:

- How much?
- How many?
- How often?

Or, just answer the question, "How will I know when I've reached my goal?"

Attainable

As we saw in the last section, having a measure for your goals lets you plan the work for your employees that is necessary to achieve the goal. But before they begin working, you need to be certain that the goal is truly attainable. What if in the example above you had said that you wanted to see a 20% increase in inbound calls in just six weeks? How would your plan for reaching the goal have changed? Given your existing resources and the workload that you have to maintain while reaching for the goal, would that even have been possible? If a goal is not attainable given the constraints that you face, you either need to work towards removing those restraints or lowering the level of the goal so that it becomes attainable.

Realistic

If a goal is to be realistic, it must be something that you are willing and able to work towards. This doesn't mean that all your goals have to be low and simple. It just means that you have done a thorough analysis of the task at hand and you have come to the conclusion that the goal is realistic. Some questions you could ask yourself during this analysis include:

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- Do I have the resources (financial, personnel, equipment, etc.) to reach the goal?
- Do I have the support of others in the department and the organization?
- What knowledge or expertise am I lacking that I will need to locate or learn?
- Have I reviewed my existing workload with my supervisor to prioritize this goal with existing goals?

In some version of SMART goals, the R actually stands for 'relevant.' In this case, you are comparing the goal to the overall mission of the organization and to your personal goals, objectives, and roles. Is the goal something that your team should actually be completing or is it better suited for someone else? Will it improve the employee's overall skills and ability to do his or her job? If not, why are you asking them to pursue it?

Timely

The final component of the SMART goals strategy is 'timely.' Without adding a time restriction to your goals, you don't have the necessary motivation to get going as soon as possible. Adding a realistic time boundary lends a sense of urgency to your goal and will help to keep you focused. Since organizations change regularly, so can goals. Making sure your goal is set with a time limit also ensures that you complete the goal while it is still relevant to what you are doing on the job.

2.3 Define Priorities

Now that measurable goals are set, you need to define the priority of each job responsibility and goal. There will come a time when your employees face a choice of making one goal or responsibility a priority above the others. Are you confident that they would make the choice that you would expect? Priorities should be clear and reinforced as new situations come up.

2.4 Define Performance Standards

Next you need to determine the key performance areas of the job. Employees should understand that doing just the bare minimum is not what you expect. They should understand what your standards are and how you want them implemented. Granted, you won't necessarily be able to identify the exact level of excellence you expect for each performance areas, but you should be able to detail it for the key areas.

2.5 Provide Feedback

Performance management is a year-round process. Sometimes we tend to think of the annual performance review as the time to manage performance. But leaving your discussions about performance to just once per year is setting your employees up for trouble.

They should know at any time how well they are doing – or what they need to be working on. You should be providing performance feedback to your employees on a daily, weekly, and quarterly basis. Ideally, when the annual performance review does take place, there should be no surprises for the employee regarding what you say.

You can also incorporate feedback from a broader range of people. Consider using a feedback system that incorporates information from peers, customers, subordinates, or any other people with whom your employees interact on a regular basis. When you work with your employees, you only see one side of their performance. It is entirely likely that you are not getting the full picture of how they have been performing in the organization.

You can use a formal feedback system, asking them to rate the employee on the same expectations that you will be using, or you can make their feedback tool unique to their form of interacting with the employee. You should consider what tools are likely to get the best response; surveys are difficult to get back from many people, and don't allow you to ask follow-up or clarifying questions. However, they can be useful for getting very specific information. Phone calls or personal visits take more time but will allow you to get more detailed information and specific examples of times when your employee performed well – or when he had performance issues.

2.6 Maintain Records

Be sure to maintain a record of performance for both you and the employee through feedback reports. As the year goes on, make notes about contributions or problems that you see so that you can acknowledge or address them at your next feedback session. Annual reports can be used to show growth over time and to identify any trends of needed improvement that can tell you where you might need to concentrate your coaching efforts in the near future.

Encourage your employees to keep their own records of their contributions and achievements. They may receive accolades from customers or other colleagues that don't reach you directly. This gives them a chance to show you areas where they have had success. Plus, knowing that you will value that information will encourage them to behave in a way that they will continue to receive more appreciation.

There is another reason to maintain good records of performance. If the unfortunate situation should arise when you feel that you need to dismiss an employee, your written history of your efforts to correct any performance issues will be vital. You will be able to show:

- A trend of performance issues
- The fact that you addressed each of these issues with the employee over a period of time
- Any efforts you made to help the employee improve (additional training, coaching sessions, etc.)
- The proof that the performance issues continued despite your best efforts

Armed with this information, if you find yourself in the situation of needing to defend your decision, you will be in a much better position to do so.

2.7 Know How to Manage Poor Performance

Develop and administer a coaching and performance improvement plan if an employee is not meeting expectations. Again, a performance improvement plan should have specific and measurable improvement goals. We'll talk more about performance improvement plans in the next chapter.

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3. Understanding Poor Performance

3.1 Introduction

If you have a poor performer, you need to try to understand why they might not already be performing at the level that you would like them to. We will first assume that any employee you have is someone with the desire to perform well. This intention is necessary for you to successfully coach anyone; even if the intention is hidden beneath a poor attitude. Your ability to identify the reasons for poor performance and then tap into the potential of a person is what will distinguish a good performance manager from a great one.

> Before you can coach an employee to their best level of performance, you need to understand what the barriers are that are keeping them from performing at that level already.

In other words, a great coach is someone who makes the poor performance of an employee his or her own responsibility. He is someone who looks at poor performance as a failure to provide some information, example, encouragement, or other resource to his employees. He recognizes that poor performers are good performers who have not yet been tapped for their potential, and he makes a plan to coach that employee towards reaching that potential.

He is willing to consider that he might be part of the employee's performance problem, and that as a result, he is part of the solution. He is also able to recognize that there are sometimes when poor performance may not be resolvable, and that in these instances, a job relationship may need to end.

3.2 Common Reasons for Poor Performance

There are a number of common reasons for poor performance in an employee, though every situation and every person is different. But the only way to get someone performing at peak levels is to find and understand their reasons. Following are some of the most common reasons.

- They lack the required capabilities.

  In this situation, the employee simply doesn't have the needed capabilities to perform the job. They might not have asked for help, or they might have asked but not received it for some reason. They might feel as if they should know it or be able to do it, and so they have tried to keep working without the needed capabilities.

Improved performance will not be possible unless you can help this employee to acquire the needed capabilities. You may need to arrange for training programs,
Improved performance will not be possible unless you can help this employee to acquire the needed capabilities. You may need to arrange for training programs,
one-on-one assistance from another employee, or dedicated time with you in order to help get them to the right place. But the important thing to realize in this situation is that if it is not rectified, frustration will grow – and performance will continue to suffer.

- The job isn't challenging enough.

  In this case, your employee is simply bored. Perhaps they have more capabilities than you have realized and that haven't been put to use. Boredom can manifest itself in several ways; poor attendance, poor attitude, and poor performance.

  Improving performance with this person will require that you find a way to end the boredom. Ask them to help train new employees, or get them involved on committees or team projects that let them learn about other areas of the company. If boredom isn't addressed, a poor attitude will eventually develop, followed by possible shirking of responsibilities.

- They feel they aren't appreciated.

  No one wants to feel that they aren't appreciated. Most of us need to get some kind of affirmation from our work and in fact, a portion of our self-esteem is based on getting that affirmation. Employees who don't feel that they are properly appreciated – whether with money, opportunities, or just words of acknowledgement – are bound to have performance issues eventually.

  This is one area in which you can take effective action as a manager. Ask yourself if you have been providing enough positive feedback. You might need to provide more appreciation to some employees than others, and perhaps more than you would normally provide. If you think the problem is that they feel undercompensated, have a frank discussion regarding what would be required in order to receive increased compensation. Is it a matter of time? Producing certain results? Or is it a budgetary issue that is out of your hands? Speak plainly, and only make promises that you are certain you can keep.

- They feel they've been overlooked in some way.

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This is a similar situation to the previous one of feeling under-appreciated, except that this situation is usually specific to feeling as if they have not been provided with certain opportunities. They may believe that they have been overdue for a promotion, a position of some status, or some other perk that others have received.

Again, you have an opportunity here to take action, beginning with asking yourself whether or not there is validity to their concern. Have you somehow overlooked the employee? Examine your thoughts about their abilities and their skills. Have you failed to give them the same opportunities as you have given to others? If so, try to understand why. Is there some prejudice on your side, or is there something actually lacking in their performance? Honest examination of the situation will help you identify your next steps.

- They don't get along with their colleagues.

  Most of us spend more time with our work colleagues than we do with our family or friends. If we don't get along with our colleagues, that's a lot of our lives that will be spent in unpleasant situations. If an employee feels like an outsider or as if he is not liked, or if he feels he has no support from his team members, then your employee is lacking a necessary resource to be able to perform at capacity.

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As the team leader, you have a responsibility to foster a supportive team environment where all of your employees at least respect and are considerate of each other even if they can't actually like each other. But there's another reason to foster this kind of environment – your whole team will work better, which will in turn produce overall better results for you. You may need to bring the team together and flesh out the root of the problems and clear out any resentment.

- They have personal problems

  Life goes on, even during the work week. All of us have times when our personal lives have encroached on our professional lives. Perhaps we needed to take or make more personal calls than normal or take time off at inconvenient times. Or maybe our performance has suffered because we are nervous, distracted, or upset.

  The good news is that this type of performance issues is often temporary. Once the problem is resolved, the performance issue is resolved as well. Identify whether or not there are resources available that can assist your employee through this time period. For example, some organizations offer employee assistance programs that involve temporary counseling or even temporary financial assistance. Don't wait until you have an employee with a personal problem to find out what resources are available in your organization – find out before you need the information so you are prepared.

  There may be some personal problems that you cannot address in the workplace. For example, you may have a zero tolerance program for drug and alcohol use in the workplace. Again, be certain that you are aware of your options and your responsibilities so that you protect yourself from any legal response as well.

- They've developed an attitude

  A negative attitude is a sign that something is wrong but is not usually the problem itself. When you have an employee with a negative attitude, your goal should be to discover what is causing the attitude. It could be any one of the other reasons for poor performance mentioned here or it could be something else all together. We'll talk more about handling an employee with a poor attitude at the end of this chapter.

- They lack the motivation

  If an employee doesn't see the reason for performing at the level you expect, she is not going to meet your expectations. Lacking motivation means that she lacks the drive to do her best. This lack of motivation can also be a symptom of another problem; for example, if an employee feels that she isn't appreciated, why would she try even harder? If an employee feels her previous efforts have been overlooked, why should she keep trying?

If your employee is not motivated, you have the chance to find what will motivate them. Once you identify what it is that will get your employee excited and enthusiastic about their work, you will resolve this performance issue. We'll talk more about motivating employees in a later chapter.

- The job isn't right for them

  In the end, there are some times when the lack of performance is due to the fact that the job and the employee are simply not right for each other. You may try to work with the employee and improve their performance, but nothing seems to work. In these cases, you may need to accept that the job is simply a bad fit for the employee.

  You have several options in this situation. You can attempt to find another position for the employee within the organization, you can attempt to reorganize job duties in order to make the job a better fit, or you can decide that it is time for the employee to move on. We'll discuss this situation more later on.

These are the main reasons that an employee may have a performance issue, but remember that there are others. Also realize that what you think is the problem at first glance may not actually be the issue at all. You will need to be willing to have open communication with your employee in order to identify the root cause. Only when you understand why the employee is having trouble with performing up to standard will you be able to help them get there.

3.3 More Discussion on Attitude Problems

When you have an employee who has a bad attitude, we discussed that it is often a symptom of another problem. You are confident that this employee is able to do the job, that they have the needed skills and abilities, but for some reason they are not currently doing so.

The problem with a bad attitude is that it can become infectious. If one person is focusing on the negative aspects of a situation, being sarcastic about your attempts at motivation, attempting to sabotage the team's efforts, or in other ways having a negative impact on the team, they may eventually affect other individuals with their negative thinking. The team's performance as a whole will suffer. If you don't handle a poor attitude, you will soon have more poor attitudes to deal with.

This situation is complicated by the fact that in most cases, someone with a bad attitude will not admit to or even recognize that they have a bad attitude. This makes it important for you to control your approach. When you first approach someone with your concerns about their attitude, some common responses are:

- I don't have a bad attitude – I'm just being realistic

- This is just who I am

- I am just saying what everyone else is thinking
- I have this attitude because of others, this organization, or you as a manager
- I don't see what the big deal is
- Other people say these things and you don't say anything to them

The key to addressing a poor attitude is to focus on the effects that specific behaviors are having on the team. It would be easier for you to be general and just say, 'you're attitude is having a negative impact on the team.' But that won't be productive and doesn't give the employee anything specific to work on. Instead, you need to isolate the specific behaviors and what the result of those behaviors is. A good form of communication to use it a pattern of 'when you (specific behavior), it (specific results). For example, you might say:

> *When you speak in that tone of voice, it sounds very aggressive and it makes your teammates uncomfortable and unwilling to express their own opinions.*
>
> *When you make negative comments about your team member it causes him to feel as if he is not a valued member of the team, which impacts his performance.*

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> *When you talk to me with that sarcastic tone, it makes me feel that you don't respect me or my role as the leader of this team. It makes our relationship strained, when it could be a mutually supportive partnership instead.*

The next step is to suggest that they try seeing what difference changing that behavior will produce. For the first example above, ask them to try changing the tone of their voice in the meeting and seeing what happens. Once they see the difference their new behavior makes, both for themselves and for others, they will be more likely to adjust their behavior in the future on their own.

4. Coaching Performance

4.1 Introduction

When you are coaching others, you should realize that doing it well is not just a science – it's an art. It requires that two people remain in a continual 'dance' of communication and partnership. If you've always thought of coaching as the one meeting you have per year to look at the employee's ratings, or the occasional meeting that you have to observe their work, then this ebook will hopefully shift your perspective on what it means to be a coach. Here's a fuller definition of coaching:

> Coaching others is more than a science – it's an art. It requires that two people remain in a continual 'dance' of communication and partnership.

Coaching is the art of inspiring, energizing, and facilitating the performance, learning and development of your employees.

Let's look at each part of the definition in more detail.

Coaches should be:

- Inspiring – by helping each employee to reach his or her true potential. Coaches can help employees see what is possible for them in their career, both in the present as well as the future. Inspiration comes in many forms and it is important to understand what will motivate each person in order to inspire them well.

- Energizing – by using effective communication, you can help to keep the level of energy up for the individual and the team as they pursue their goals. Energizing an individual requires getting and taking into consideration their suggestions and demonstrating and encouraging a 'can do' attitude.

- Facilitating – meaning you don't do coaching on your own – you do it in partnership with the employee. Their role is just as important as yours and they are likely to have important insights into their own situation.

- Performance – improving performance means reaching for greater effectiveness or efficiency. Exactly how you achieve this goal will depend on the type of work that you do and the individual that you are working with. However, it may involve learning and development.

- Learning – Improving performance might require learning a new way of doing things or a new approach to an old problem. Learning doesn't always require formal training programs, although that is certainly a valid way of increasing knowledge. You could simply teach an employee a new skill or habit that will help them to reach their goals.

- Development – learning is certainly one way to develop an individual, but there are others. Any time you help someone to increase their abilities, their confidence, their understanding, or their self-awareness, you are helping them to develop.

Now that we've thoroughly explored the definition of coaching and mentoring, we will look at what's involved in becoming a successful coach.

4.2 Characteristics of a Successful Coach

Most of us have had the experience of working with a great coach. Someone who inspired and motivated us, who helped us to grow and become more skilled and capable than we were before. In order to become a successful coach, it takes time and patience. But it also takes a certain set of skills. First, a coach needs to understand when it is time to step in, and when it is time to step out. Depending on how new and experienced the employee is at a certain job, this timing can vary greatly.

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Along similar lines, a coach needs to recognize what kind of coaching is needed. Does the situation call for you to work side by side with the employee, or do you just need to check in from time to time and weight for him or her to come to you? A good coach knows that he is always ultimately responsible for the performance of his team, but that there are different levels of responsibility that an employee can take on as well. In this chapter we'll look at ways to recognize what level of coaching is needed, as well as some of the specific skills that can help you be a successful coach.

4.2.1 The Coaching Continuum

To discuss how a successful coach knows the right amount to coach employees, we'll first use a concept called the coaching continuum. Take a look at Figure 2 below. The figure shows the percentage of responsibility for a task that the manager and the employee each have. On the left hand side, we have a situation in which the manager has most of the responsibility for the task or job that the employee is to perform. In other words, the manager needs to be more involved in the task in order to ensure a positive outcome.

On the far right-hand side, we have the reverse situation. The employee now has the majority of the responsibility for the outcome, so coaching will not be as intense. The coach would instead be allowing the employee to take the responsibility and run with it. Notice that the employee is never 100% responsible for their performance or their outcomes – this is because a manager is still ultimately responsible for their employee's quality of work. It is never appropriate for a coach to be entirely hands-off. He or she must remain at least informed of what the employees are doing.

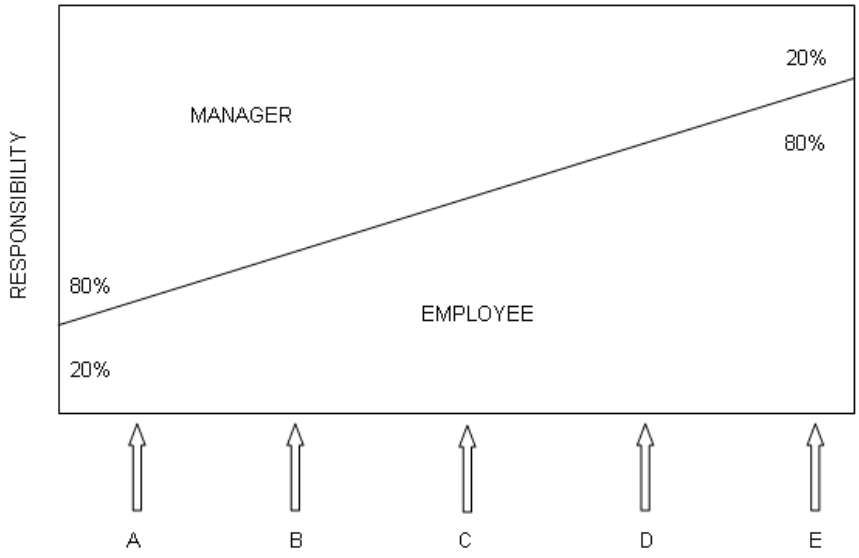

Figure 2: The Coaching Continuum

On the left-hand side then, the type of coaching that you would do is much more intensive. You would be directing the employee to a greater degree – some might even call it micromanaging. You're telling the employee what to do more than making suggestions. There are a number of reasons you might need to coach an employee this intensely:

- The employee is brand new
- The employee isn't new, but the task you've asked them to perform is
- The employee doesn't have the full skill set needed to complete the job independently
- The desired outcome is of so high an importance that you must remain involved
- The employee is having performance issues

On the right-hand side, you are maintaining a level of coaching that empowers and motivates the employee, but you are not micro-managing. You are making suggestions, engaging in problem solving, but letting them make many of the decisions on their own. In this case, the situation may be that:

- The employee is highly experienced in the job at hand
- The task is a low priority one
- The task's outcome is of little importance
- You are purposefully testing the employee's abilities to work independently

Of course, these are the two extremes, but there are different types and levels of coaching that may be needed along the continuum. For each point indicated by the arrows at the bottom of Figure 2 your coaching would be different.

- Point A – Tell the employee what to do versus what not to do. The employee has the security and confidence of knowing that they are doing exactly what you want them t
- Point B – You wouldn't tell them what to do explicitly, but focus more on giving advice. You might also demonstrate ways that you have handled the same situation in the past and what the results were.
- Point C – At this 'half-way' point, you are making suggestions, talking things through, and remaining neutral. You may remind the employee of boundaries in their decision-making, but you don't make the decisions for them.

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- Point D – Here you would be asking more questions of your employee as a form of coaching. You'd be helping them to brainstorm, to think out loud, and to find their own way through the task. As you become a more experienced coach and the people you coach become more experienced, you'll spend more and more time at point D or beyond.

- Point E – In these situations, your job is mainly to make sure that the employee is comfortable with the level of responsibility that they have taken on. You will be facilitating, encouraging, and supporting the employee while retaining ultimate responsibility for their performance.

When you are working with new employees, you will naturally be spending more time on the left-hand side of the continuum. But as you become more acquainted with how to best coach your employees, you will be working to move them more and more quickly towards the right-hand side of the continuum. Doing so results in a more effective team – and gives you time for coaching individuals and developing your team as a whole.

Whatever the situation that you need to coach an employee through, the ideal situation is that you can step in, do what is needed to set your employees on the road to success, and then step-out again. When you step in, you:

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- Set the vision
- Clarify expectations
- Identify deliverables and timetable for completing them
- Establish the resources that are available to the team
- Encourage and motivate them to get to work

Once those steps are complete, you step out. You let the employees come to you with questions. You encourage them to make their own decisions using their best judgment. You support them, but you fight the urge to step back in and solve problems for them.

As you monitor progress, if things are going well, you will simply need to continue to support the employee, evaluate the work being done, make any corrections you see that are necessary, and reinforce the vision for the desired results. If you find that things are not going too well, you will want to reexamine whether or not you have been giving the employee the right type and amount of support.

Perhaps you needed to be more involved than you have been. Or perhaps you have gotten in the way and your employee hasn't had the ability to make the decisions that you have asked him or her to make. You might need to move in one direction or the other on the continuum until you see that the employee is back on course.

4.2.2 Skills of a Great Coach

In addition to knowing the level of coaching that you need to give to your employees in given situations, there are some basic skills that help to make a good coach into a great one. The good news? Each of these can be learned.

A great coach:

- Is great at questioning and listening. When they are talking to an employee, they help them to find the answer to their questions or problems by asking questions. They are curious rather than judgmental. They help the other person along on their journey of discovery rather than telling them what the answers are.
- Uses rephrasing to clarify what is happening in the other person's mind. Not just so that the coach understands it, but so that the employee does as well. Rephrasing what the employee says helps to shape ideas, flesh them out, and pinpoint what they are trying to say.

- Is able to help their employees look at situations from more than one perspective. Reframing situations helps to ensure that you are not labeling or judging the situation, but rather can be very helpful in problem solving, brainstorming, and decision-making.

- Clarifies what is important, particularly in situations where there is a great deal of detail. Employees may have issues performing because they find the level of information they are dealing with to be overwhelming. A great coach can help them to identify the priorities as well as which details are not as important.

- Helps the employee to see opportunities where they didn't see them before. A great coach has a good vision of the future and helps employees to achieve their goals – even if they might have thought the goal was not possible.

- Demonstrates the type of behavior, commitment to the vision, and level of performance that he expects to see in his employees.

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5. Performance Improvement for Individuals

5.1 Introduction

In this chapter, we'll be looking at some specific methods for coaching individuals to better performance. These models can be put in to use in a modified form for corrective performance management, but are also excellent for simply coaching a high-performing employee into even higher levels of performance. There is no one correct way of coaching performance. As long as you and your employees are seeing the benefits of performance management and coaching tools, then you are doing fine. However, you can always read through these models and examples for new tactics that you could try. Just like your employees can continually improve and grow in their roles, you can do the same as a coach.

5.2 The GROW Model

The GROW model was developed by Graham Alexander and John Whitmore. The name is an acronym, with each letter standing for a different phase of the model. GROW stands for:

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G – Goal

R – Reality

O – Options

W – Way Forward

5.2.1 Goal

Goal refers to the objective or target for the team member. This is not just a list of goals that you give them – it should be a mutually agreed-upon vision of the future for that team member. This conversation helps them understand exactly what their objectives should be. Certainly, you could address some of their present or recent past behavior, but you should focus on where the employee should be going from this point forward.

The individual employee might not be able to express exactly what goals they have for themselves in the future. You can help them by exploring their personal goals, which can provide some interesting information for you. It also gives you a chance to reinforce the benefits of a performance management process as a way to help them achieve those goals.

Some questions you might ask the employee regarding their key performance measures include:

- What do you hope to achieve in this area?
- When do you hope to achieve it?
- What would success in this area look like to you?
- What would be indicators that you are having problems in this area?
- How can I help you avoid those problems?
- If I were to coach you exactly in the way you would like to be coached, what would that look like?

But the goal step can go beyond the employee's performance in their current position. You can also explore what they aspire to in the long-term with the organization or in their professional life in general. Some questions that might help you with this goal conversation are:

- What would you like to have achieved in this position or organization in a year from now? Two years from now? Five years from now?

- Are there any opportunities in the organization that you know are available but that you haven't taken advantage of yet that you would like to pursue in the coming year?

- Are there any work skills that you know you would like to develop more in the coming year that I can help you with?

Just having these conversations can lead to a new level of motivation for your employees. Imagine you learn that one of your employees wishes they were better at public speaking. Perhaps you could find opportunities for him or her to practice by training other employees on a new product or service. When you show employees that you want to help them achieve their own goals in addition to achieving the goals required of them, you will find that your employees truly become your partners in managing their own performance.

5.2.2 Reality

Reality means taking an inventory of where you are now in relation to where your employee is now in relation to the goals that you have identified together. This helps you to ascertain exactly what you need to complete the journey ahead.

Reality can be a deceptively simple concept. In the sense of an employee's performance, she may have a completely different idea of where her performance level is at this point. She could feel that she has performed at a higher level than you do, or she could not see herself as having met up to the expectations you have previously set. You may need to discuss and explain your perspective on her current performance level before you can begin planning for her movement towards the goals. At the same time, you need to be willing to listen to her perspective on her performance. There may be miscommunication, misunderstanding, or some other unresolved barrier to being on the same page when it comes to identifying the reality of the current situation. Remember that this is not necessarily a negative step. Sure, you might have to correct some misconceptions about current performance, but it's also a chance for you to show appreciation for high performance levels and improvements.

Additionally, you should be able to identify how her performance level got to the current point. What actions have you as a coach taken that have contributed to her current level of performance. What actions have you not taken? Before you ask the same questions of her, be sure that you have considered the answers to them about your own role.

5.2.3 Options

Options refers to the various ways that there are to move from reality to the goal. During this step, you look at the gap between where we are and where we want to get to, and look at what alternatives we have to get there. The team member can assist by discussing what options might be available to them and ascertaining which ones would be most effective.

Some of the options for the journey to the goal may include:

- Training
- More Coaching
- Mentoring – the team member could be the mentor or the mentee
- Personal reading or research
- Increasing education level
- Increasing experience level
- Job enhancements such as increasing responsibility

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These are just a few examples – the exact options you choose will depend entirely upon the employee you're working with and the goals you have come up with together. When you have determined what options you feel would be best, you are ready to go to the last step of the GROW model.

5.2.4 Way Forward

This step is when you and the team member come up with an action plan for exactly how the chosen options will be implemented. During this process you will need to agree on:

- Specific timelines and deadlines
- Detailed deliverables and expectations
- Resources that will be provided or made available
- What level of help and supervision the coach will provide
- When and how progress will be communicated

When the final step is completed, your team member will be ready to be in action. You should both now be clear on what, when, and how the goal will be accomplished, and you've established a support schedule when you can make sure that things are proceeding as planned or make any corrections to performance that are needed.

5.3 The OUTCOMES Model

There are some similarities between the OUTCOMES model and the GROW model, though of course the former is more detailed. OUTCOMES stands for:

O – Objectives

U – Understand

T – Take Stock

C – Clarify

O – Options Generation

M – Motivation to Action

E – Enthusiasm and Encouragement

S – Support

5.3.1 Objectives

This step is similar to the G in the GROW model. In this stage you are working to understand what the team member is trying to achieve. You will attempt to get an idea of what specifically the person is trying to achieve from either the coaching session or their objectives. Again, this is a conversation and a learning process, not just a directive.

5.3.2 Understand

Understanding the reasons behind wanting to achieve the identified objectives is what is required during this step. This is a vital step. More often than not, employees either 'under-stretch' or 'over stretch' their objectives. In sales, for example, one of the main under stretches is wanting to simply build rapport and fact-find within a sales call as opposed to actually sell anything on a first visit. By understanding the reasons behind the 'rapport' objective, a manager can support and challenge a salesperson to achieve both those objectives together with starting the selling process.

5.3.3 Take Stock

This step is similar to the Reality step in the GROW model. Your goal is to take stock of the current situation. It's important to spend time analyzing the present situation so that a manager can establish a performance 'baseline.' And then from that baseline, you have something to measure change in performance by.

5.3.4 Clarify

Clarify refers to clarifying the gap between where the team member is now and where they need to get to in order to achieve their objective. Sometimes with the GROW model an inexperienced coach or manager can perhaps jump from Reality to Options without fully understanding the gap that has to be crossed or filled. They can go straight to the how without fully understanding the what. By clarifying, you make sure that you are both in agreement as to exactly what the change, progress, or development is that needs to happen.

5.3.5 Options Generation

Similar to the Options in GROW, in this step the goal is generating all the possible options for moving forward. While the first options to occur may seem like the best, this step should involve some brainstorming. How many managers ask: "if there was one other way you could do it, what would it be?" The pros and cons of each option need to be discussed. This stage can take time and many managers just go through the motions, or worse, manipulate their employee with leading questions that enable the person to come up with the options the manager wants to hear. Instead, take your time and allow the person to generate their own options.

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5.3.6 Motivation to Action

Once the options have been discussed and the best way forward agreed, the manager must check the motivation of the person to move on the actions. Are they agreeing to actions because that is what they think the manager wants to hear or are they really motivated to move on the actions? The manager must have the ability to check this and challenge any signs of demotivation.

5.3.7 Enthusiasm and Encouragement

This stage and the one that follows are ones that continue through the rest of the coaching process. The manager must at all times show enthusiasm for the objectives ahead and encourage the person to do as best they can. If you falter in your enthusiasm and encouragement, you will risk the team member becoming demotivated very easily.

5.3.8 Support

The manager must always show support for the team member in the tasks agreed upon and must also ask if there is any support that they need in order to assist the team member. An example of this could be a sales executive asking their sales manager to sit in on a sales call and be ready to answer any difficult questions the customer may ask.

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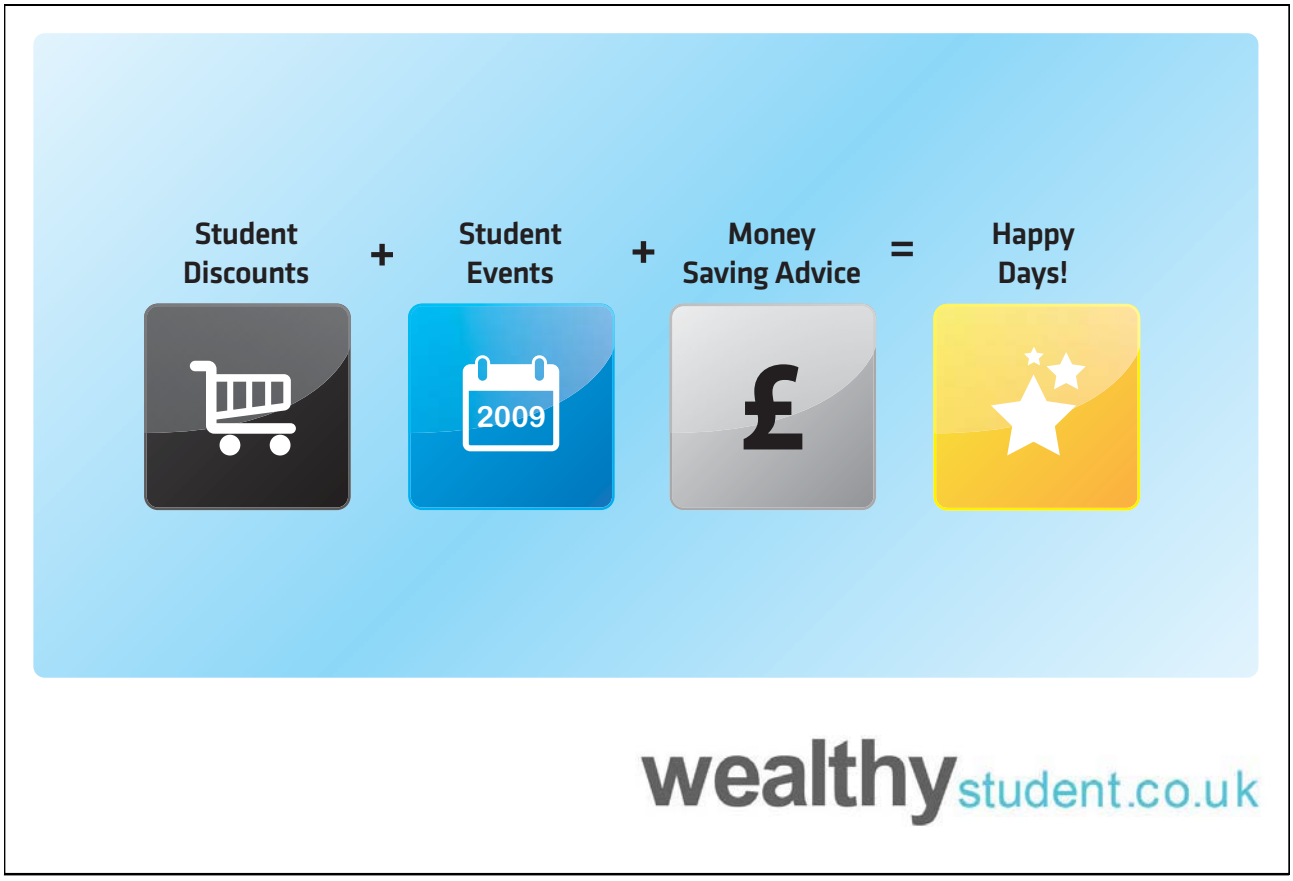

Recognize as well that there may be times when the performance plan that you've been coaching your employee through will need to change as the organization changes. It will be your role to support the team member through any alterations to their activities in order to come into alignment with the new needs and priorities.

5.4 The Personal Development Program (PDP)

In this section, we'll look at some specific steps you can take when you meet with the team member in order to go over their personal development plan or program. Although you may need to adjust is slightly for your team member's job responsibilities, you can use this as an outline for the actual meetings (quarterly or annually) you would have to discuss personal development and performance.

- Meet with the person in a private meeting and ensure you are both in rapport.
- Discuss and agree on the objective of the meeting, which is to create a performance development plan which will keep them looking forward and help them to achieve a particular goal.
- Get the team member to discuss the achievements and successes accomplished during the quarter (year, etc) because they may have info you don't have.
- Let them identify ways in which they would like to further develop their performance – training, assignments, challenges, etc.
- You should then discuss the performance for the quarter and suggest ways in which the person might further develop their performance in the future – your focus throughout the meeting should be 80% on the future and only 20% on current or recent issues.
- Add your thoughts to the person's selected areas of development and improvement. Demonstrate that you are willing to help them grow in the areas that they would like to improve in.
- Discuss areas of agreement and disagreement, and work together until you reach consensus.
- Examine job responsibilities for the coming quarter and in general using the job description or previous performance development plans that list them. You may very well need to change or add to them since jobs naturally evolve over time.
- Agree upon standards for performance for the key job responsibilities – how will you measure success? If you can't measure success, you will be leaving your assessment of their performance up to your subjective observations, which may not be accurate.
- Set goals for the quarter. Document them, including how you will measure the achievement of each goal.

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- Discuss how the goals support the accomplishment of the team or company's business plan and objectives. Let the employee understand how their role is important in the division and beyond. You could do this by asking them what would happen if they failed to perform their job at all? What is the impact on others if they don't meet their goals? Having this discussion makes it easier for you to gain commitment to the established goals and it encourages the team member to take ownership of them.

- Agree upon timelines for achieving the goals and objectives. Set milestones when you would like to check in on progress and when agreed upon steps will be completed.

- Assuming the team member's performance is satisfactory, establish a development plan with the person that helps them grow professionally. What opportunities or resources will you provide?

- If performance is not satisfactory, provide feedback. Develop a written performance improvement plan and discuss the consequences of continued poor performance. Agree upon when you will meet again in order to follow-up and check-in on their progress on the plan.

- Give the team member the opportunity to discuss and respond to your feedback, then give them the chance to add their own constructive observations. Remain open-minded here – they may give you information that will tell you how to better coach them in the future.
- Get agreement on the next steps. You should both leave the meeting knowing exactly what the team member will be focusing on and what you will be doing to help them.

- Discuss anything else that they would like to discuss, hopefully maintaining a positive and constructive environment. Remember, you're focusing only 20% on current issues and 80% on the future.

- Mututally sign the performance development tool to indicate the discussion has taken place. Allow them to add any comments they would like to add as well.

- End the meeting in a positive and supportive manner. Confirm your confidence that they can achieve the plan and that you are available for support and assistance.

- Set a time-frame for formal follow-up. Generally quarterly, which gives adequate time to gauge progress and to ascertain if you need to make any corrections to the plan.

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5.5 Giving Feedback

No matter which model you choose to use or what steps you follow, you will need to be comfortable with giving feedback to your employees. This is often the challenging part for managers, particularly if they believe the feedback is negative. They may fear confrontation, or their general management style may mean that giving feedback is uncomfortable for them.

However, there are some methods you can use when giving feedback which will help ensure that you get the result that you want. You know you have an intention of improving performance and assisting the employee to be successful when you give feedback. But you need to make sure that the team member understands that as well. Here are some tips to help you give feedback to your employees.

- Make sure that you are choosing the right time to give the feedback. Are you or the team member already stressed over something else? Are you emotionally calm enough to trust that you will be able to deliver the feedback in a constructive way? If you can't deliver feedback immediately after an incident, be sure to take down the important information so that you can refer to it later, and wait until a meeting would be most constructive.

- Make sure the feedback is descriptive, not evaluative, and that it is focused on specific behaviors, not generalizations. This helps eliminate the tendency for the team member to get defensive.

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- Make the feedback actionable. In other words, make sure that there is something that the person can actually do about it.

- Make suggestions rather than commands (when possible) – when someone feels they have some control over the next step it helps them to take ownership over taking action on the feedback.

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6. Performance Improvement for Teams

6.1 Introduction

Helping a team improve its performance is different than working with an individual. It requires viewing the team in a similar way to how you view an individual – as having goals, objectives, performance expectations, and the need for performance management. But it is more complex and requires a different set of steps in order to help the team improve as a whole.

- Step 1 – Defining the purpose and priorities – like individuals, teams need to know what they are trying to achieve and why they are trying to achieve it before they can focus full attention and effort where it is needed. You can do this by asking some questions that will stimulate insight into the team's purpose like:

    - How can we maximize our team contribution to the overall objectives of the organization?

    - What is our purpose in the business?

    - Would anyone notice if we weren't here?

  As this discussion evolves, consider creating a team mission and vision statement.
  This helps to infuse the team with inspiration and keep them motivated.

- Step 2 – Understanding the environment – teams exist because of the external social environment they are in (the organizations) and because of their own members. Where the expectations, purposes, or beliefs of these two forces conflict, the coach can help identify the source and impact of the conflicts and help the team establish practical ways to resolve or defuse them. Ask questions like: how can we work in conjunction with the business to create value for everyone here?

- Step 3 – Identifying and tackling barriers to performance - Knowing what the team is supposed to achieve and what it is achieving, you identify and work on the reasons for the gaps. In practice, this takes a great deal of reflective time, gathering of data and analysis of feedback to establish what the barriers are, whether they are external or internal to the team, whether they reside within the team as a whole or within specific individuals (for example, a skills deficiency), and whether they relate to structures, systems, know-how, or behavior.

The coach's role is to facilitate the learning dialogue that explores these issues and ensures that problems are acknowledged and dealt with openly. It is also about helping the team recognize when they are thinking as a group and not as individuals.

- Step 4 – Building the team development plan – the team plan defines what the team and its individual members need and want to learn, and how this will contribute to the business purpose and responsibilities. It is just as important a document as an organizational business plan because it underpins targets and goals with practical ways of developing capability and capacity.

- Step 5 – Growing in confidence – A frequent role for the team coach is to work one-on-one with the team leader (if there is one), and separately with the team members (without the team leader) as well as bringing them all together. Crucial here is:

    - Building the competence to accept and value different contributions

    - Understanding the different pressures the team leader is under compared with the team members (and his or her role in protecting the team from some of those external pressures)

    - Developing the feedback processes that recognize day to day achievements

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- Step 6 – Maintaining the balance – the team coach has a multifaceted role when it comes to maintaining a healthy, working balance on the team. He or she must:
    - Encourage the team to think more broadly, yet maintain focus on the practical
    - Help the team balance the need for short term performance versus building capability for the medium and long term
    - Support the team leader without duplicating or over-riding the line role. Maintaining the appropriate balance is difficult but essential.

The growth of one-to-one coaching has been much faster than team coaching, not least because the latter is more difficult, less clearly scoped and a less well understood concept in business. In the next five years, it is expected that more employers will be using team coaching and more coaches will be expanding their portfolio to include work with teams – and increasing attention to measuring the impact of these interventions.

6.2 Building a High Performance Team

When you think about your role in the workplace, consider this idea: you will be remembered when you leave the organization for how well you managed your team. If you want to build a high performance team, then you need to continue to work on building your individual and your team coaching skills.

One other tip? Know what happens to kill performance of a team. If you are on the lookout for these symptoms, you can stop a real problem from developing by responding quickly. Some of the things that can kill your chances for developing a high performance team are:

- Personality conflicts – team members don't get on
- Bad leadership – leadership is inconsistent, poor or non-existent
- Unclear vision – the leader has foisted a defocused mission on the team
- Anti-team culture – you (or your team) aren't really committed to the teamwork idea
- Insufficient feedback and information – performance isn't measured and team members are left groping around in the dark, hoping they get it right
- Mismatched needs – people on the team have private agendas that are working at cross-purposes to the team's agenda
- Confused goals or cluttered objectives - people don't know what they are supposed to do or what they are supposed to prioritize
- Unresolved roles – team members are uncertain what their specific job is
- Bad decision making – the team may be making the right decisions but making them the wrong way
- Bad policies or poor procedures – the team is at the mercy of an employee handbook that doesn't apply to them, doesn't support them, or makes no sense to them

So the first step to building a high-performing team is to identify if any of the issues above are happening in your team. You need to resolve and eliminate them before you can move on to assessing your team and determining how to coach them to success.

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6.3 Team Assessment

A team assessment is an exercise in learning what the strengths and areas for improvement are in your team. Your goal is to have them tell you how to get the best performance out of the team. You can do this by having discussions that reveal what the team needs from you in order to perform at their best.

Questions to ask yourself and the team include:

1. Our team works best when…?

   You might be surprised at the answers. What they tell you reveals information about their perspectives, goals, agendas, what is important to them, and what might be lacking for them in the team work style or in your coaching style.

2. Out team works poorly when…?

   You should elicit specific experiences they have had that don't work for them or what is causing obstacles to good performance. Where and when do they get stopped in their work? What team dynamics aren't supporting them?

Once you have fleshed out these two questions and you feel you have answered them as clearly as possible, you can move on to the next three questions.

3. What I want from my team-mates is…?

   When they give you a response like 'communication,' don't stop there. Get them to be specific. Do they feel they need to be listened to more? Or do they feel they aren't getting sufficient information? What examples can they give you where communication failed, and what was the result?

For the final two questions, try again to get specifics. If they feel the team is strong in helping each other, get them to tell you a time that they have experienced that. If they tell you they feel the team is weak in customer service, get them to tell you a time that happened and what they experienced as a result.

4. The strengths in our team are…?

5. The things to change/improve are…?

When you have the answers of all of these you are in a good position for understanding the foundation that your team is sitting on. Throughout the discussion, keep investigating general statements. Make them tell you exactly what they mean – otherwise there is too much left to interpretation and nothing for you to take action on!

6.4 Twelve Conditions for a High-Performing Team

So now that we've looked at what can prevent a team from performing at a high level, and we've discussed a tool for assessing the current state of your team, let's take a look at some conditions that need to be in place in order for teams to function at a high level. These are general ideas which apply to teams, but there may be more conditions that your particular team will need to function well. You have hopefully learned some of them from the assessment described in the previous section.

There are twelve basic conditions for a high-performing team which you can take on as goals to work towards:

- There is a high level of interdependence among the team members
- The manager has good people skills
- Each person is willing to contribute
- There is a relaxed climate for communication
- People develop a mutual trust with each other
- People are prepared to take risks and feel comfortable doing so
- They are all clear about the goals
- Their roles are defined

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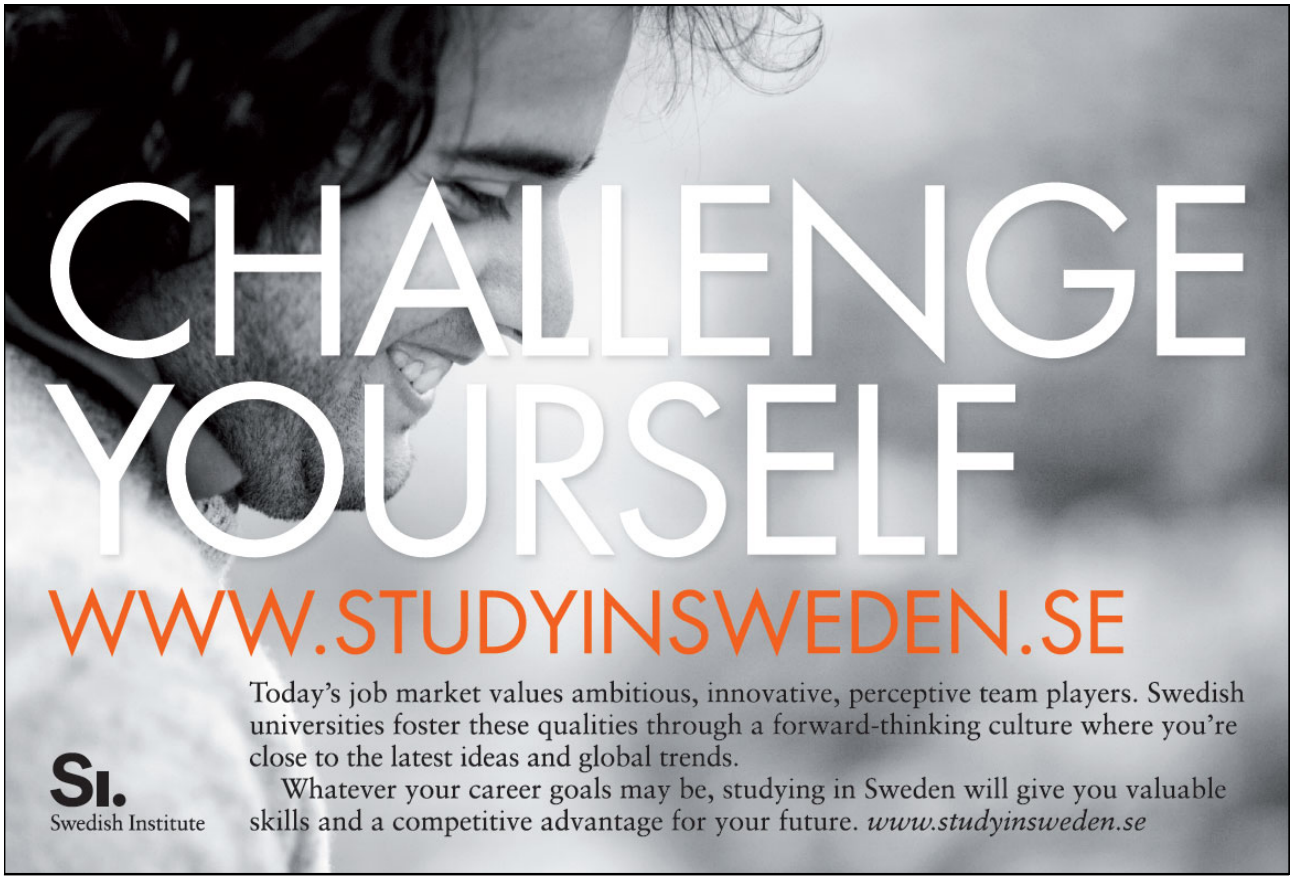

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- They know their strengths and weaknesses
- They know how to read results
- Each person is encouraged to create new ideas
- People know they can influence the results of the whole team

If you are considering these conditions as your own coaching goals, now you need a plan to achieve them. Let's take a look at how you can get reach these goals

6.5 Achieving a High-Performing Team

First, make sure everyone on the team is committed to the team's purpose. They must know exactly what that purpose is by the team leader keeping them focused and constantly communicating that purpose in team meetings and regular updates. The team leader helps each individual team member meet his or her own needs while serving the overall purpose of the team.

Next, establish motivating goals for the team members. The team leader should ensure that everyone on the team has clearly defined goals and targets. Your team's goals may be determined by senior management. In that case, make sure that these goals are clearly discussed. Team members should understand how their jobs support the achievement of the defined goals, and, if possible, have the opportunity to develop individual goals and action plans that spell out how they will contribute to the success of the whole business.

You'll need to ensure team members have clearly defined expectations but also, that they understand how each of their roles is linked to ever other role. Make sure team members are cross-trained in other responsibilities so that everyone can back each other up when needed. The team leader makes sure that individual job responsibilities are fulfilled, but, at the same time, works to help the individuals develop a common language and common processes and approaches that allow them to function as a team.

On the best teams, team members solve problems, communicate with each other, and keep the team leader updated on current challenges or emerging issues. On low-performing teams, communication is one-way (from team leader to team members) or two-way (between the team leader and individuals). Skilled leaders focus on developing multi-directional communication, making sure the team has lines of communication open between themselves.

Determine the level of authority and ownership the team can take. New teams may have to earn this authority by demonstrating that they understand the team's purpose, processes and priorities. However, effective team leaders work toward pushing authority for the team's outcomes to the team members. Team members know how and when to get approval for decisions and, in the best of cases, are charged with making on-the-spot decisions when a customer is facing them. On low-performing teams, team members have to constantly get approval before taking action, significantly reducing their effectiveness and negatively affecting their sense of engagement on the team.

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Recognize diverse talents. Excellent team leaders pay attention to helping team members understand their unique strengths, talents, and weaknesses. No individual can be good at everything, so the best team leaders assist everyone to develop an appreciation for individual style differences, natural gifts, and personal experience. Teams are encouraged to use the language of acceptance and appreciation, rather than criticism and judgment. Team leaders consciously hire team members who bring complementary skill sets, unique experiences, and diverse perspectives.

Work on developing support and trust. You can't force a team to be supportive and trusting – it's a natural result of shared responsibility, shared success, and mutual respect. The high-performing team achieves mutual support and trust because they have a history of working together to achieve great results. They have met challenges, overcome obstacles, backed each other up in good times and bad. A high-performing team has earned each other's trust.

These recommendations can help you and your team to move into the level of high-performance and to create the conditions that are necessary for maintaining that level of performance. Once you have don't your assessment of the team, it's time for you to use the same general tool you used for a personal development program – but for the team as a whole.

Based on the assessment results and once you have shared some of these goals with the team, decide as a team what you will work on. What goals can they commit to? What actions will they take to achieve the goals? You'll need to get commitment and agreement from the individuals for their own actions as well as from the team and how they will interact with the rest of the organization. Make sure, just as with the individual performance management tools, you have a way to measure success. How will the team know that they are achieving their goals?

Continue to have follow-up assessments and check the team's progress on what they agreed to do. Identify any areas where they are not measuring up to their word and get agreement to address those. Encourage them to continue taking responsibility for the team's success and for their own. And last, but not least, be sure to celebrate the team's success as well as your own for helping them to reach their success.

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