



MANAGING EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IS A COMPETITIVE ADVANTAGE FOR YOUR BUSINESS



By Sue Jones

Though many things have changed over the years regarding how you manage your employees' pay and performance, the most significant changes focus on providing ongoing feedback. Employees today want and expect regular feedback. They are no longer willing to wait for an annual review to determine whether their performance is on track. Having open and honest ongoing dialogues with your employees goes a long way toward improving the performance of both the employee and the company.

It is no secret that companies with high-trust cultures outperform businesses with low-trust cultures. Studies of employee engagement find a direct correlation between high-trust cultures and higher productivity, increased innovation, and improved employee engagement and retention.

WHAT DOES IT TAKE TO DEVELOP A HIGH-TRUST CULTURE?

It starts with you. It requires you to meet more frequently with employees, assessing their performance and giving feedback. If you are meeting regularly with your employees, setting clear expectations and addressing things in an open and trusting manner will put you ahead of the curve.

When I talk about performance management, I am referring to the activities or processes you have put in place to develop a culture that enables your employees to perform at their best. If you already have a performance management philosophy in place, now is a good time to review it to make sure that it aligns with your company's goals and objectives. If you do not have one, now is a great time to put one in place.

PERFORMANCE REVIEW PROCESSES

Your role as a manager is to manage your employees' performance every day. Managers own the performance management system and use it as a resource to guide to lead, coach, and do whatever it takes to ensure that their employees perform well. Think about your current performance review processes. Are they rigid or more flexible? What opportunities do you have to incorporate more frequent communication and dialogue with employees?

If you are still conducting annual performance reviews, you might want to take another look at the value of that process. Fast-moving companies today are focusing on providing real-time feedback to employees so that they always know where they stand and where they are headed. This approach centers on the successful completion of goals and objectives in the future. If you are still conducting annual performance reviews, I challenge you to ask yourself why. Why do you want to spend your time and energy, as well as your team's time and energy, focusing on past results? Wouldn't you rather invest your time and energy, as well as your team's time and energy, on achieving results based on future goals and objectives?

SETTING CLEAR EXPECTATIONS

Employees want clarity about your expectations. They want goals, and they want recognition when they achieve those goals. Start finding time to communicate regularly with your employees. Make it a priority, and watch your company's performance improve. Making performance management a priority is key to building a high-trust culture.

Why is it that we can set clear expectations and goals regarding performance but we fall short when it comes to providing regular ongoing feedback to our employees? Managing performance as a daily activity is a relatively simple concept, but it requires dedication to change our behaviors.

DAILY PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

The list below highlights several tools that you can use to shift the focus from structured annual reviews to more flexible forms of performance management. These tools are great resources that will assist you with managing performance on a daily basis.

- **COACHING JOURNALS:** Create a one-page sheet on which you can make notes, or "journal entries," about employee behaviors that you recently noticed or observed. Your entry can be as simple as making a brief notation about an error lack of attention to detail on an assignment or a note regarding the extra effort an employee put forth when completing a project. The value of this tool comes from keeping the coaching journal front and center. Reviewing it daily is important so that you can start to identify patterns of behavior that you want to address with an employee.

- **ONE-ON-ONE MEETINGS:** Conducting regular one-on-one meetings with your employees is key to establishing a trusting relationship. A trusting relationship is an important part of both giving and accepting feedback. As managers, it is important for us to build trust with our employees so that they feel secure enough to accept our help and offer us their feedback in return.

The following is an example of a one-on-one preparation form that an employee would complete and bring to the meeting. It is a simple worksheet that employees can spend as much or as little time as they want on in order to complete. The value of the one-on-

One-on-One Preparation Form
Please make a copy for your manager to refer to during your meeting

LOOKING BACK:

1. What I have accomplished since our last one-on-one?
[Blank box]

2. Concerns or difficulties since our last one-on-one
[Blank box]

TODAY:
The areas I need your assistance right now are:
[Blank box]

MOVING FORWARD:
My top three priorities for the next two weeks are:

[Blank box] **1**

[Blank box] **2**

[Blank box] **3**

one preparation form is that it prompts dialogue and communication during the meeting by focusing on current problems and top priorities moving forward.

- **KEEP START STOP (KSS):** This is a simple but effective coaching tool to use during either a formal coaching session or a flyby. The KSS model helps us assess what we should keep doing, what we

should start doing, and what we should stop doing by thinking about the following three questions:

KEEP: What is working well that we should keep doing?

START: What might give us better results? What should we start doing?

STOP: What is not working?

The KSS model is an effective coaching tool that makes it easy to convey your message. The following is an example of how to use the KSS model to provide feedback to a manager about providing less direction and delegating to the team.

Keep on holding your one-on-one meetings with your staff. I am seeing positive changes in your team's engagement because of this process. Start asking more questions during the one-on-ones that allow your team members to develop more ideas and solutions. Stop providing detailed step-by-step instructions. Let your team learn to problem-solve more.

- **COMPETENCY (BEHAVIOR) ANCHORING:** This is a valuable tool to use when you need to address behaviors that span a particular time period. The intent of the model is to "anchor" your feedback to the behavior or competency that you want to address by providing key specifics about time, cost, and outcomes. You should provide three specific examples to create a solid anchor. Research tells us that employees are more likely to believe and embrace feedback when they can trust and verify the information.

Managing performance as a daily activity takes practice. No matter what tools or resources you use to communicate and provide feedback, don't forget the importance of recognizing and rewarding your employees for behavior that goes above and beyond regularly throughout the year. A Bamboo HR study found that 40 percent of employees only receive recognition a few times per year—or less.

Reward and recognition are never wasted efforts. Make sure you don't pass up opportunities to recognize and praise employees throughout the year.