

Removing the Barriers to Performance

How many times in your career have you felt low? How often have you noticed it in your peers, the people you manage, or the people that have managed you? This lack of motivation will in almost every case have a negative effect on the person's ability to perform to their full potential with the result that performance is not what it should be and results will suffer. As results suffer then the ill-informed and un-skilled manager will potentially increase the pressure and the level of motivation will continue in a downwards spiral. This could potentially be disastrous for both the individual concerned but also for the manager and for the organisation. Serious health issues could occur and occasionally these can result in the individual not only being ill but citing the company and the manager as the cause of their ill health.

There are numerous reasons as to why a person may not be performing to their potential but what does not help is the inability of management to properly identify what the "root cause" of the lack of performance is. Too many managers make quick and ill-informed judgements; in other words they "jump to conclusions" and as a result make hasty decisions about what the corrective course of action is. Judgements such as "just lazy", "not got it", "troublemaker", "not up to the job", "can't take the pressure" and "can't cope with the new environment" are just a few comments that I heard over the years. I have heard some others as well that have absolutely appalled me, given the management positions these people were in!

Why do managers make such hasty judgements? One reason is that they do not know their people well enough. They do not spend enough time with them to fully understand their personality style, their motivators and de-motivators, their strengths and weaknesses and how they are actually progressing with their work objectives. Their judgements are based on a lack of knowledge, understanding and skill.

One area of skill that lacks in a lot of managers is the ability to actually identify what is the real cause of the lack of performance. Simply asking the question "What do you think is causing your lack of performance?" is better than immediately jumping to an ill-informed conclusion but this may only illicit a superficial response in the form of an "excuse". Examples of these are; "marketplace is bad just now", "I don't have the right materials", "The customers cannot be seen anymore", "Our prices are too high" or the classic "It's only a phase, I will get through it". Some of the "excuses" may have some validity but more often than not there is a different, more valid, reason as to their lack of motivation and performance.

Managers need to probe further and they must take time to do this if they are to get their employee back on track. I have developed a framework that managers can use to structure their time with the employee. The framework is called CARERS™, and all a manager needs to do is to outline to the employee that he or she will take them through a series of questions covering certain areas of their work with a view to supporting them to identify what areas they can work on together in order to get the individual re-motivated and performing to the level that they have worked to or aspire to.

There are some pre-requisites to CARERS™ being effective, though. Firstly, if the manager is the actual “root cause” in that their behaviours are causing the issues, then there will be little trust between the two and as such there will be little honesty in the answers given by the employee. Secondly, if the manager is not a listener and is prone to do a lot of “advice giving” then again the chances of getting a good result will be low. Thirdly, the manager must go in with an open mind and not have any judgements about what may or may not be the problem. Finally, the manager must know when to “refer” onwards. E.g. If in the identification process it transpires that the “root cause” is a personal family problem or a psychological problem then it is not coaching that is needed, but it may be counselling or even therapy. The manager must know when to refer to the appropriate professional.

Most situations will be as a result of the organisation, the manager or the individual’s skill and I think in my experience of dealing with people in these performance situations I have only come across two situations in twenty years where the person needed referring on to another professional.

How does a manager use the CARERS™ model?

Firstly if there is a performance issue then time must be put aside to sit down with the person concerned. At least 1-2 hours. This person must be made to feel that the manager is there to support them and not to discipline them. The process is about reversing the lack of performance by mutual discussion and positive action. Discipline procedures only come after agreed objectives have not been met within an agreed time frame and performance has stayed low or even declined.

The manager simply explains that, informally, they are going to explore some key organisational areas that are vital in motivation and productivity with a view to seeing what may be causing the lack of performance and then agreeing a plan of action that will help the person to improve their performance. It should be stated that this plan will be supported and also be monitored to help them along.

Then it is simply a case of taking the person through the various steps in an informal and supportive way, suspending judgements and attempting to understand fully what is happening with the individual. The manager should take a coaching approach, always ensuring that the person answers questions and formulates their own way forward. The manager may in some cases have their own actions as a result because it may be that some of the factors that cause demotivation lie with them and the organisation. You will also find that in some cases the cause may be a “given” (e.g. organisational policy – car policy!) and that the employee will just have to live with it. The manager needs to understand the issue here but not agree with the employee. If it is a “given”, then a way forward should be worked out that works around this “given”.

You will find some useful questions below that you can ask when using the CARERS™ model. Give the model a try.

The CARERS™ Performance Management Model

C	Clarity & Focus	<p>How clear is the role? Does the employee understand exactly what their objectives are? Do they know how to move the objectives forward? Do they know how they are going to be measured?</p>
A	Ability	<p>Have they the ability to fulfil the role and the objectives? Is there a development plan in place to support them? Is there a commitment to the Development Plan?</p>
R	Relationships	<p>How are their relationships with the manager, peers and customers?</p>
E	Environment	<p>Is the culture conducive to the effective working of the employee? (e.g. dictatorial v empowering) Is there a clear development pathway for the employee? Is there a company commitment to training? Is the training appropriate and of good quality? Are there company benefits available? e.g. pension, health-plan, flexible working etc? Is there any aspect of change affecting the employee? e.g. merger, downsizing, role rotations etc.</p>
R	Reward & Recognition	<p>Is the employee's efforts and expertise being rewarded and recognised? Is the employee being valued? Are there opportunities for bonus payments etc? What about promotion prospects?</p>
S	Support	<p>Does the manager regularly support the employee through both good communication and coaching? Has the employee been given the right tools/equipment to do the job?</p>

About the submitter:

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