

Uncovering the Secrets to Effective Performance Management.

In many ways there are no secrets to implementing effective performance management. Performance Management is a process and a process which if implemented effectively should ensure that both employees and managers remain both productive and motivated.

The actual process itself should hold no secrets. There are simply a number of steps to be considered within the Performance Management process these being as follows:

1. Agree roles and responsibilities and the objectives and targets that go with the role. Ensure that both the manager and the employee know what success looks like in relation to each objective. Sales targets are easy to quantify but project objectives may not be so easy to define success.
2. Ensure the actions needed to achieve the targets and objectives are agreed and achievable.
3. If some of the actions needed are deemed out-with the capability of the person who has to achieve them, then create a development plan in order that the person is trained accordingly.
4. Agree a review process by which each individual is coached and supported to keep on track as regards both their objectives and targets together with their development plan.
5. Mid and Year end appraisals should be simply a “tick box” exercise holding no surprises. If there are then the process building up to the appraisal is not working.

The secrets to Performance Management do not just lie with the actual process but more with the skills and discipline needed to make each of the steps work effectively. And it is the way these skills are used, or not used, that can cause the whole performance management structure to collapse.

At each of the stages there are challenges in any role. Let us look at each step in turn.

1. Objective and Target Setting – The biggest challenge here is where all the targets and objectives are handed down without any consultation and support. If a manager does not take an employee through their objectives and targets then demotivation and in some cases panic can set in. Employees need to understand exactly why they are expected to deliver various objectives and also what the exact manager’s expectations are. The aim of this stage of the PM process is to ensure clarity and focus. Leave people in the “fog” and they get lost! Do not simply “dump” objectives on people.

2. Once the objectives are set then employees need to be supported in being coached through exactly **what they need to do in order to achieve** these objectives. Very capable people will need less support than newer employees but all the same, time should be taken to coach them effectively. Again the challenges here are one of the manager putting time aside and also in relation to the ability of the manager to coach effectively. Most managers will advise and direct as opposed to coach and as such they really need to look at their skill level in coaching. Directing is quicker but can be very de-motivational and much less effective.

3. Training. Everyone pays homage to training and training plans but very few people actually deliver an effective training plan. Managers usually abdicate responsibility for the training plan leaving it to a training department or to the employees themselves. Even though training needs are identified, the only solutions to meet these needs may be the “sheep dip” approach of getting them on the menu of training events supplied by training department. But are they specifically what is actually needed? And what role does the manager take? Do they sit down with the employee and agree learning objectives? Do they monitor progress against these objectives? What about coaching the person post-training enabling them to implement their newly found skills directly into the workplace?

4. In terms of reviewing an employee’s progress, does the manager spend enough time with the employee? How well are they utilising essential field visit (distant managers) and review skills such as contracting, coaching models such as GROW and OUTCOMES®; use of the skill/will matrix, behavioural analysis, giving and receiving feedback and of course, motivational models such as MASLOW’S and CARERS™ ? Field visits are not just about going out with an employee for the day to check up how “they are getting on” and sitting in on a few customer calls. There is a lot more to it than that!

5. The aim of regular reviews and field visits is to ensure that the employee keeps on track with regards their objectives and targets. If the employee enters into an appraisal not knowing exactly what they have done in terms of their objectives and targets or not knowing what their manager is specifically going to say to them in the appraisal then the performance management system has not worked and has to be reviewed to see where the faults have originated. The only surprises that should be delivered are the good ones like an increase in pay that was unexpected or a better car! If employees are “in the dark” about what to expect at their appraisal, then I would hate to be in the shoes of the manager who is conducting the appraisal when it comes to their turn!

Performance Management is a simple uncomplicated process but one which needs discipline and a great degree of skill to implement effectively. Get it right then you are on the way to success; get it wrong and you can look forward to a really stressful year end appraisal.

About the submitter:

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