Supervisory Essentials

Helping Supervisors Transition To Effective Leaders

impact

About "Supervisory Essentials: Helping Supervisors Transition to Effective Leaders"

Representing the largest pool of management talent in most companies, supervisors prove critical to an organization's success. Companies that develop superior leaders can execute more effectively than their competition.

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Research about employee engagement provides evidence that frontline supervisors play a crucial role in the productivity and morale of their employees. The link to customer service is equally significant. When untrained supervisors are in charge of frontline employees with customer contact, the impact on customer relationships can be devastating. Based on negative interactions with supervisors, frontline employees may exhibit negative attitudes, resolve problems incorrectly, or take other actions that damage goodwill, brand and profits!

The chapters of this e-book are derived from [The Supervisory Basics Training Series], which provides a framework for working effectively in a supervisory or management position. The Supervisory Basics Training Series consists of 12 individual yet linked two-hour modules, delivered in leader-led or eLearning formats, helping managers understand the management behaviors and tactics required to ensure their own and their company's success. The first two chapters are designed specifically for new managers or supervisors, and the remaining chapters apply to both new and seasoned supervisors.

More information on The Supervisory Basics Series can be found at the conclusion of this e-book.

Listen to the Supervisory Basics Podcast Series: *Tips for Managers and HR Professionals on Helping Individual Contributors Transition to Effective Leaders.* Available on iTunes.

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Chapter 1: Helping Newly Promoted Managers Succeed – Good for Them. Good for You.

Introduction

When an employee is promoted to a new managerial job or hired directly into a new managerial job – perhaps straight from college, the new manager is required to use additional skills to the ones he/she used to rise as a star independent contributor to the company. Many companies and their stars fail to recognize this fact and leave their success to luck and the proverbial "throwing spaghetti at the wall to see if it sticks." This is bad strategy, as "nearly 60% of frontline managers underperform during their first two years in the seat, driving performance gaps and employee turnover across the entire frontline." [1]

Nearly 60% of frontline managers underperform during their first two years in the seat.

However, the mindful development and training of new supervisors and managers in people skills, customer focus, and performance management skills leads to "high-performing direct reports" that create value for the customers and a winning, successful business formula.

People Skills in the Beginning

While some level of technical expertise is necessary for supervisory positions – depending on the specific supervisory job – nothing makes up for failure to develop people skills. There are basically two kinds of bosses: good bosses and bad bosses. Good bosses demonstrate clear and consistent patterns of challenge and support. They are neither "softies" nor people who don't require best efforts. At the same time, good bosses are often credited with providing true encouragement and support that enables high performance.

Good new managers also:

- **Model appropriate behavior.** Bad bosses use a wide variety of awful/poor behaviors – and many of them are character issues. Character issues trickle down to employees, often resulting in lack of discretionary effort, company loyalty, and inappropriate behavior.
- **Are patient.** Going slowly in the beginning earns the respect and credibility necessary to make changes – even those that not everyone agrees with – in the future. Making changes and quick

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[1] Business Wire. September 2007

decisions when first starting a new supervisory or managerial role can hurt effectiveness.

- **Learn about direct reports.** What are an employee's strengths and weaknesses? Knowing who is good at what is critical to getting work done.
- **Are visible and accessible.** The more accessible a supervisor or manager is, the smaller the "learning curve" for getting to know and understand the boss. The more a manager is out-and-about (management by walking around), the more dialogue will take place. Being visible also improves productivity, as the mere presence of a supervisor communicates supervisory interest in the work and attention to quality of the work.

Troubleshooting in the Beginning

"The magic formula that successful businesses have discovered is to treat customers like guests and employees like people."

–Tom Peters,
A Passion for Excellence

Friendships are an area where new managers often find trouble. A common mistake new supervisors make is assuming that everyone else is as excited about their promotion as they are – or that friends will have the same approach to the relationship as they do. For many, a new supervisory or management role requires supervising or managing friends or past peers. This must be handled with care. Common pitfalls the new manager needs to avoid: apologizing for the new position; showing favoritism instead of managing performance; emphasizing friendships beyond the workplace while at work; and being artificial – pretending the friendship doesn't exist.

Some good-natured ribbing, especially from friends or coworkers, is normal. However, others, for a variety of reasons, either might resent the promotion or not know when enough is enough and keep up the teasing or snipes. Sometimes, just ignoring the needling stops the behavior. Otherwise, if it keeps going, the best way to handle that situation is for the manager to keep composure. He/she neither needs to justify their new position/promotion nor humor the situation. Make it clear that that commentary is unacceptable. Maintain confidence. Dealing with the situation immediately increases the new manager's influence and gains him/her respect from most people. The fact is that the nature of friendships is changed and often challenged due to a supervisor or managerial relationship. This must be managed effectively.

Initial Team Meetings

Initial team meetings are where expectations are set, a “feeling out” process occurs, and opinions get formed. The first few meetings are used to set a supervisory tone, establish initial credibility, clearly communicate confidence in the new position and clarify performance expectations.

The new manager needs to identify essential content pieces for the first team/group meeting. These include: reassurance that it will be business as normal; reassurance that everyone has a clean slate; stressing teamwork and cooperation; emphasizing open and candid communication both ways; and the “no surprises” rule (if they have problems or difficulties, they should be brought to the new manager’s attention).

To get off to a good start, the following tips are suggested for having a productive and successful first meeting:

- Have it soon.
- Make it short.
- Have the meeting at the end of the day if possible.
- Make the topic simple – for instance, expectations in general.
- Leave some time for questions.

Key Takeaways

People skills are critical to good leadership. Good bosses are often credited with providing true encouragement and support that enables high performance. Good managers are patient, visible and accessible; model appropriate behavior, and learn about their direct reports. New managers need to clearly and confidently navigate workplace friendships so that authority is not undermined. Having a short, simple team meeting as soon as possible will assist in the transition process.

Chapter 2: Working With the Boss: Tips for Managers and How HR Can Help

Introduction

Effective managers understand the importance of developing a good relationship with their boss. A good relationship with the boss means becoming a valued resource to the boss. Since the boss is the person with the greatest control over their future as a manager, how well new managers manage this relationship will, to a great degree, have a critical impact on their career aspirations and success at that job.

Human resources can assist newly promoted managers by pointing out specific things a new supervisor or manager can do – at first and then routinely – to become a valued resource to the boss.

Use the Boss as a "Sounding Board"

Boss doesn't equal "buddy" – but it doesn't mean enemy either.

During the first few months on the job it is tempting for new managers to make suggestions or changes too soon, but there are some very good reasons to be cautious. First, new managers have little to no credibility or supervisory experience at this stage in their new role. Second, the new manager hasn't been around long enough to know the "ins and outs" of why things are done the way they are. Third, their boss might be the one who created what they want to change.

However, if new managers want to make a good first impression with the boss, there are two critical things that they should do: run ideas and/or decisions by the boss, and have solutions, but be willing to get feedback before implementing. Following these two steps allows several important interactions to occur:

1. **Coaching moments from the boss.** The insight, input and lessons from the boss will let new managers get a feel for how the boss likes things done.
2. **Assurance that decisions are on the right track.** Bosses usually like to have things done a certain way. They also have knowledge of what has been tried in the past and what has not worked.
3. **New managers get assurance that they have their boss' support.** The last thing new managers want to hear in the early stages of a relationship with the boss is, "Why didn't you run that by me before you went ahead?"

Get to Know the Boss

Just as the successful manager understands the importance of "being the customer" the new manager understands the importance of "being the boss." The boss wants the new manager to make his/her work life more productive and stress free. This means working effectively with the boss with a minimum of problems that could easily be avoided by understanding what is important to the boss.

Don't avoid giving the boss bad news. Always be forthright regarding problems and potential problems.

There is one key rule for new managers to keep in mind: Keep the boss informed. Bosses don't like to be surprised by news they believe they should know, especially regarding important news. New supervisors should follow this "No Surprise" rule even if it means giving the boss bad news. It's better to be forthright rather than letting the boss hear about potential problems from others.

Other important points to keep in mind are:

- What specific topic areas does the boss want to know about?
- How does the boss like to receive information? In writing? Verbally? Formally? Informally?
- When is the best time to get some of his or her time? Mornings? Afternoons?
- How do other successful managers interact and deal with the boss? Ask them.
- Watch the boss in meetings. Does the boss have any personal tendencies or quirks when it comes to work, communications, and interactions?
- Get to know the type of questions the boss might ask and anticipate them. Count on being questioned by the boss regarding the reasons or supporting data for holding opinions or making decisions. It's important that the reasons and data supporting opinions and decisions are valid and well thought out.
- Double-check and validate the information received before briefing the boss, especially in the beginning. A faulty thought process or reasoning and invalid data can result in a quick loss of confidence by the boss – and ultimately hinder any autonomy and increased responsibility in the future.

Do Not Pass the Monkey (i.e. Don't Make Extra Work for the Boss)

Upward delegation of work from the manager to the boss when the manager should take the initiative to do the work is a big problem for the boss.

Upward delegation of work from the manager to the boss when the manager should take the initiative to do the work is a big problem for the boss. It creates more work for the boss. This action is called "passing the monkey." Some of the more serious consequences of passing the monkey are:

- The boss becomes frustrated with the manager—having direct report responsibilities dumped on him or her.
- The boss loses confidence in the manager – the manager can't handle the job
- A dependent relationship emerges – the supervisor becomes dependent on the boss as the problem-solver and provider of answers. Initiative is avoided.
- Wasted time – the upward delegated work competes for the boss's own job requirements and responsibilities – often delaying important boss related issues.
- Lack of development – the manager learns little as the boss is doing the work and tackling the issue.

By keeping work monkeys off the boss's back, new managers shows two important qualities that a boss looks for in a good manager: initiative and personal responsibility.

To prevent unnecessary 'dumping' on the boss, new placed managers must remember to communicate problems and difficult issues with the boss before acting. When bringing up an issue, they should provide sufficient background on the problem. This includes detailing consequences of continuing with the status quo or present practice, and providing best-effort recommendations or solutions. Also, new managers should frame issues and suggestions in a manner that benefits the bottom line of the organization. By following these rules, the new manager can earn both the respect and support of his or her boss.

Key Takeaways

Good bosses appreciate good managers. By observing the "rules" of boss/manager relationships, a new manager can make tremendous strides in regards to success and career advancement. Good bosses operate not by mysterious forces but by practical needs. Get to know the boss and how he/she likes to operate. Keep the boss in the communication loop and, by all means, keep the work monkey off the boss's back.

Chapter 3: Helping Supervisors Understand the Value of a Customer – For Life!

Introduction

Business acumen is a basic understanding of how an organization makes money (delivers value). For a business to be successful in the long term, a supervisor/manager must understand and follow through on the idea that satisfying the customer is the lifeblood of a business. The customer is the one with the money that builds the base upon which all business strategies rely. A quality product or service supported by a superior customer experience creates loyal customers – they come back and say good things about their experience. Word spreads.

"There is only one boss – the customer – and he or she can fire everyone in the company from the chairman on down simply by spending their money elsewhere." –

–Sam Walton, founder Wal-Mart Stores

Unhappy customers do not come back and will most likely share their bad experience with others – thereby also damaging a company's hard-earned reputation along the way. The smart manager has the business acumen to understand that creating value for customers is critical in the business equation and will do what it takes to serve the customer even though the customer's expectations may seem "unrealistic."

Stew Leonard, the founder of Stew Leonard's Dairy, was known for making explicit to all employees the "lifetime" value of the customer. He concluded that if his company could earn a customer's business every week ($200 a week), for 50 weeks every year (two weeks off for vacation), for 10 years (average number of years customers live within his demographics) he could earn $100,000 from a single customer. That is the value that Leonard wanted every employee to see pasted on every forehead of every customer in his store, so the customer would be treated like an asset rather than a transaction.

Every department in every organization plays some part in creating value for customers. The effective supervisor or manager must be trained to connect the dots between the performance of his or her work group and its impact on customers. How will the performance of a workgroup or department influence the customer's decision to buy from/use the organization? Are they creating positive word of mouth? Are they positively creating repeat business?

Creating a focus on the customer is a primary responsibility of any supervisor or manager. Service quality is a management issue – not a frontline issue. The employees will march to the drumbeat of the person they report to. When the supervisor or manager has a customer focus, the employees will respond in kind. Making money is the goal of the organization and the customer is the source. Make the customer happy. Make money. That is the most fundamental successful business strategy a company can have.

Customer value elements over which workgroups and/or departments have control include:

- Quality of product
- Cost of product
- Convenience
- Time
- Easy to do business with
- Responsiveness

Principles of Customer Loyalty

Today, customers in almost every industry have more choices of similar products, at similar prices, at similar quality levels, with more places of access, than ever before. This puts an emphasis on superior employee performance – not just mediocre performance – in creating loyal customers. Traits to look for when trying to achieve customer loyalty:

1. Brilliant at the Basics – Operational Excellence

Success depends on being in touch with the fundamental things that truly contribute to a customer spending money with your organization

Success depends on being in touch with the fundamental things that truly contribute to a customer spending money with your organization. If a company can't deliver the basic promise that has been made explicitly or implicitly to customers, that company is wasting its time. Managers and the groups that support the success of the customer's experience need to look at the basics. Basics include the right product or service, the right place, the right time, and the right way.

2. Be the Customer

Being customer-focused is about gaining a clear understanding of exactly how things done in the workgroup and/or department affect the customer and other employees who rely on delivering the basics. Details that seem trivial may not be so to customers and other employees. Consider the downstream consequences – to other employees and to the customer – when poor performance results in wasted time, delays, defects, inconveniences, and irritations. Employees will become frustrated. Customers won't bother to return. The revenue stream will begin to dry up.

3. Under-Promise/Over-Deliver

Perhaps the worst situation one can get in with customers, or other people who depend on your results, is to over-promise and under-deliver. This creates dissatisfaction and frustration with customers/ other departments, damages reputations, and puts the work process in chaos – all the while, direct reports are performing under anxiety.

Things to look out for include:

- Creating expectations that can't be met with existing resources or processes.
- Ineffective communication between different departments and divisions.
- Processes and policies that don't consider the unexpected.
- Attempting to pacify customers in the short term without considering the ability to follow through.
- Not taking into consideration the implicit expectations of customers. Often there are implicit expectations held by customers and other employees – accuracy, the meaning of "soon," appropriate attitude, past precedent, etc.

4. Remarkable Recovery

Fixing errors or handling complaints ... quickly and effectively dramatically impacts business

Fixing errors or handling complaints – especially those coming from external customers – quickly and effectively dramatically impacts business. Remarkable recoveries are done with a sense of urgency, speed, a positive attitude and a clear apology for the inconvenience.

When a recovery is handled poorly, or without concern, effort, and urgency, the customers or person on the receiving end has two problems: the original problem and, now, the poor recovery – which by then they are most likely taking personally.

Superior managers, staff and companies understand that customer experience is comprised of all four principles being applied at the same time all the time. This customer-centric focus is the foundation of business acumen.

Key Takeaways

There are two fundamental competencies that every successful supervisor or manager must acquire: 1) People skills – the ability to develop, inspire, and influence direct reports (discussed in Chapter 1 and to be discussed further in this e-book) and 2) business acumen – acquiring a basic understanding of how the organization makes money. Business acumen requires an understanding that service quality is a management issue, and that happy customers will return – the key to a company surviving and thriving.

Chapter 4: When an Independent Contributor Becomes a Manager: Four Principles of Successful Management

Introduction

The one characteristic in the workplace that has the most significant influence on employee discretionary effort and loyalty to the organization is the quality of the relationship between individual employees and their direct boss or supervisor. Failing to develop a respectful and professional relationship with direct reports can lead to loss of talented employees because they either quit and leave or, worse, they quit and stay – creating a real management challenge. High-performing direct reports display superior performance and excellent attitudes. They give their discretionary effort. This benefits everyone, from the customer to the entire organization.

...just being a well-intentioned supervisor is not good enough.

Human resources can support the retention of top talent by understanding that managers and supervisors have the most profound impact on talent management and that just being a well-intentioned supervisor is not good enough.

There are four basic performance management principles that dramatically increase the effectiveness and success of any supervisor or manager. By teaching these four principles and the skill sets supervisors need to execute them effectively, human resources can develop effective and even inspiring supervision/management skills in their new hires.

The four basic principles of effective performance management are:

1. Align behavior
2. Time and influence
3. Motivational assumptions
4. Consistent accountability

The research is clear, and it can't be said enough, performance, discretionary effort, and retention are all most affected by the relationship the employee has with his or her boss. All aspects of an employee's job are pervaded by their direct supervisor. Good bosses = good jobs. Bad bosses = bad jobs. Good bosses provide a combination of challenge and support by skillfully executing on these four principles of effective performance management.

Align Behavior

First and foremost, they align their behavior. Effective supervisors and managers make sure that their words and actions are congruent. When words and actions are congruent, integrity, credibility and trust in the supervisory relationship is established. Nothing causes more frustration and cynicism in the workplace than the "values gap" – the difference between espoused values of the organization and the actual behavior of supervisors and managers that doesn't support those values.

"The boss makes the difference!"

– Rick Tate and Dr. Julie White, authors of the book *People Leave Managers... Not Organizations!: Action Based Leadership*

When a supervisor's behavior aligns with his/her words, there is no confusion on the part of the employee when it comes to performance expectations, performance priorities, what is important to the supervisor, and accountability.

Time and Influence

When it comes to managing the performance of others, every supervisor or manager has only two resources – the time spent with direct reports and their influence potential with those direct reports. Like any resource that is invested – a desirable return is needed. To maximize the highest return on these two limited resources, the successful supervisor invests these resources with the "right" people.

The "right" people are the 80 percent of employees who are what we refer to as "reactive," that is, they react to the time, energy and leadership provided by the manager. It is this "reactive" group that can benefit from the supervisor's time and influence and provide them with the highest return for the investment of their time and influence.

Our experience has shown that most often, supervisors spend the majority of their time with the lowest performers, representing only about 5 to 10 percent of direct reports. Research has shown that this investment pays little in the way of positive dividends, as these individuals don't respond well to any manager or supervisor, despite the quality of performance management practices. That does not mean that low performance should be ignored – these people require structure and accountability – but not a lot of wasted time.

Then there are the 5 to 10 percent of direct reports who are superior performers, and they will be high performers under any conditions, no matter the quality of performance management practices. While they are fun and enjoyable to work with, spending significant time with superior performers does not provide a significant return. For these employees, providing autonomy, delegation and responsibility – which communicates trust and respect in the process – is appreciated.

Time spent with these top and bottom performers is time not spent where the highest return is: those "middle 80%" employees who will truly react to and benefit from a supervisor or manager's time and influence.

Motivational Assumptions

Effective supervisors and managers turn the myth of employee motivation on its head. They don't operate from a premise that "happy employees are productive employees." They don't get caught in the "bribe" for performance game. Instead, they operate from a "productive employees are happy employees" mindset. They know that morale is a by-product of success, contribution and productivity, not the other way around.

Effective managers and supervisors realize their job is to provide clear performance expectations, resources to do good work, opportunities that match talent, a nurturing, caring relationship, respect for the opinions of others, acknowledgment of others' contributions, high expectations for quality work, and a concern for the development of direct reports. These supervisory controlled factors influence discretionary effort and loyalty to the organization more than any other factors.

Consistent Accountability

...holding employees accountable for poor performance can be one of the most difficult situations for supervisors.

Accountability is the foundation of any high-performing organization. However, holding employees accountable for poor performance can be one of the most difficult situations for supervisors. The unpleasantness of these situations can often create procrastination and tolerance of poor performance.

Historically, though, procrastination and tolerance damages productivity by lowering motivation. High-performing and solid-performing employees don't like working side-by-side with those who don't carry their weight, and they don't like having supervisors who tolerate poor performance. The supervisor's role in the accountability process can't be overlooked. Performance expectations are altered with performance conforming to the tolerance level of the specific supervisor or manger. Without specific training in skill sets relevant to the accountability process, performance levels drop as issues of fairness and distrust increase.

Key Takeaways

A good relationship between an employee and their direct report releases discretionary effort and creates loyalty. Human resources can support managers by teaching four basic principles of performance management: Align behavior, Time and influence, Motivational assumptions and Consistent accountability. Retaining top talent becomes easier with the consistent use of these four principles.

Chapter 5: Employment Law: Compliance Basics

Introduction

As human resource professions already know, federal, state and even company policy regarding employment laws is complex and strict. Perhaps nothing can cause a supervisor or manager as much difficulty as ignorance of applicable labor laws. A clear understanding of the rights of employees is not just important – it is essential knowledge. Legal concerns can and will vary by organization and state, province or country. This chapter does not attempt to educate human resources or managers on the specifics of employment law, but rather attempts to present an overview of basic labor laws and what it means to be an agent of the organization.

Labor Law Basics

- Sexual harassment laws cover all employees. Managers have a responsibility to inquire into any rumors regarding sexual harassment or issues regarding a hostile work environment. Managers must show they have done due diligence via appropriate inquiry. Ignoring the issue puts the manager and the organization at legal risk.

Sexual harassment laws cover all employees. Managers have a responsibility to inquire into any rumors regarding sexual harassment or issues regarding a hostile work environment.

- Organizations can be found guilty if they knew, or reasonably should have known, about illegal acts. For instance, an organization can be found guilty of allowing sexual harassment even when the leaders (supervisors, managers, etc.) have no knowledge of the offending behavior.
- An organization is usually considered “guilty until proven innocent” when accused of illegal labor practices. The burden of proof usually falls on the employer to show that behavior was not discriminatory.
- Sexual harassment or hostile work environment protections extend to customer, vendor and supplier relationships, as well as to employees.
- Health insurance is not a legal right. It is a benefit offered by an organization. However, if it is offered to any full-time employee, it must be offered to all full-time employees.
- It is unlawful to discriminate on the basis of a person’s country of origin or nationality, but people from other countries only have the

right to work in the United States if they have obtained that right from the U.S. government.

- A person can't be fired because of their age unless there is a mandatory retirement age in the organization that applies to all employees. A person can be fired for performance or inappropriate conduct issues (in accordance with the organization's termination policies) at any age.
- While employers should avoid inquiring about an applicant's age, the age of the employee is an acceptable question when it applies to asking whether the applicant is over the age of 18 and/or whether age is a job requirement (like serving alcohol).
- Employment law covers all rights and obligations within the employer-employee relationship – whether they are current employees, job applicants, or former employees.

Advise employees to treat voice mail, email and Internet usage as if it were public knowledge.

- The right of privacy does not extend to certain workplace activities and documents, including email, contents of company desks and lockers, voicemail, and information about activities that could create liability for the company (such as sexual harassment or illegal practices). Advise employees to treat voice mail, email and Internet usage as if it were public knowledge. Employees have a reasonable expectation of privacy in their personal possessions: handbag, briefcase, personal phone calls. Regarding workplace security, consult HR.
- Employee privacy includes reasons for requesting medical leave, discrimination or harassment issues, and violations of law or matters of public policy. These matters can only be shared with those in a "right to know" position.
- Skills, experience, motivation, ambition, and interests are generally permissible subjects of pre-employment inquiries.
- Supervisors are required to work with their employees to make it possible for them to practice their religious beliefs – within reason. These allowances are called "accommodations." Supervisors are required to accommodate their employees' religious practices and beliefs unless doing so would cause their business undue hardship.
- Anti-discrimination laws protect all workers from employment decisions based on protected status – race, color, religion, national origin, sex, age or disability under federal law.
- As a representative of the company, a manager must report any information that pertains to the performance of employees regardless of where and when that information is heard. To avoid problems in a social environment, do not inquire about personal

issues off the job and warn off any disclosure by employees while off the job.

- Regarding job references from potential new employers, information must be specific performance data based on clear, specific performance behaviors related to clear, specific performance expectations and standards. It can't be subjective opinions or labeling of intent, motive, personal characteristics, even if documented in written performance appraisals. Best bet: stay clear of providing detailed information about employees.
- Requirements for a college degree must be related to job duties – eligibility criteria – and not the time frame the degree was attained.
- An employee who reports a violation of the law by his or her employer cannot be retaliated against.
- An employee cannot be fired for the sole reason that the manager does not like him/her.
- A manager must never make promises or commitments that he or she is not prepared to follow through on. Being a representative of the organization, a manager's promises or commitments are usually considered binding.
- There is no legal requirement for anyone to provide a recommendation or referral for anyone else. Managers can choose not to comment.
- Managers are agents/representatives of their companies 24/7. Remember that any information learned, no matter how or where it was obtained, is now organizational knowledge. Anything a manager requests is now an order from the organization. Any promises a manager makes, explicitly or implicitly, can be enforced against the organization.

Key Takeaways

Managers don't need to be legal experts, but they do need to have a clear understanding of the rights of employees and then follow through on upholding those rights. Failure to do so exposes the company to liability and damages the integrity of the manager and company. Mangers should have a working knowledge of laws relating to sexual harassment, discrimination, privacy and other compliance issues. If there are any questions, the manager should go to human resources for help. Under the eyes of the law, ignorance is not an acceptable excuse for labor violations.

Chapter 6: Developing GREAT Performance Review Skills: Tips and Guidance for Managers

Introduction

Providing input into an organization's formal or informal performance review process is an important responsibility for managers. Developing specific skills that provide fair and just performance review is one of the important undertakings for managers.

There are three critical elements to a great performance review:

1. Clear expectations that focus on results
2. Well-defined performance standards
3. Clearly defined performance measures

Clear Expectations – Distinguishing Activities from Results

Asking "Why is this particular task or activity being done?" can help define performance expectations or end results.

Understanding the differences between activities (efforts, personal characteristics) and results (outcomes from activities) will help the manager be an effective supervisor. Managers must want results and define those results for their employees. Sometimes asking "Why is this particular task or activity being done?" can help define performance expectations or end results.

For example, "supervises employees" is an activity. "Maintains 90 percent customer satisfaction" is a result. "Knows how to repair equipment" is a personal characteristic. Having the knowledge to repair equipment doesn't mean the employee actually does it, or does it accurately or in a timely manner. "Maintenance of machinery to specs" is a result. "Assists team members" is an activity. A manager must ask himself what the purpose is for assisting.

Well-Defined Performance Standards – What Does Good Work Look Like?

Well-defined performance standards answer the question: "What does good performance look like?" They tell employees what to shoot for so they can win. They also allow for self-management and self-responsibility. Clear standards eliminate surprises when it comes time for performance reviews.

Studies have shown that 98% of people see themselves in the top half of all performers.

Generally, four factors can be used to create performance standards that affect the success of the business.

- **Quality** – Does the stakeholder or customer care how well the work is done?
- **Quantity** – Does the stakeholder or customer care how many are produced or how fast things get done?
- **Time** – Is it important to accomplish the activity by a certain time or date?
- **Budget** – Does the stakeholder or customer care about the cost, or is it important to accomplish the activity within certain cost limits?

The Gold Standard – The Importance of Setting Minimum Performance Goals

No matter what type of form and rating scale an organization uses, all supervisors and managers must be able to articulate to direct reports the standards that represent the evaluation scale used by the organization.

For example, if a company uses a rating scale that categorizes employee performance into various levels: acceptable performance, routinely above acceptable level of performance, and sustained superior performance, the employee needs to know exactly what constitutes those levels.

Performance goals should start with what the minimum acceptable performance for the specific job responsibility is.

Also, performance goals should start with what the minimum acceptable performance for the specific job responsibility is. Goals should not rest on what the employee has achieved in the past, what the manager thinks the employee might achieve in the future, or how the employee fares against other employees.

It is a good rule to reward contribution and good work by rating performance relative to minimum acceptable job requirements, i.e., “what is expected of any individual who holds the job.”

Not following this rule often means a lower-performing employee gets higher marks because the standards are lowered to accommodate that particular employee. Talented employees then get angry and take their high performance to another organization. When moderate performing employees share in organizational rewards at the same rate as higher performing employees, the performance review process loses its credibility and integrity.

Accurately Measuring Performance – How Will We Know?

For each performance expectation, managers need to ask "How could quality, quantity, speed, timeliness, and/or cost effectiveness be measured?" The measurements need to actually measure and be relevant to the standard set for each performance expectation. If the element can't be quantified and can only be qualified in subjective terms, the manager needs to ask: "Who could judge that the element was done well and what factors do they look for?"

Good performance measures enable employees to know how they are performing and also what changes or improvements they can make to improve their performance.

Also, managers must ensure that measurement and tracking is done routinely. The more frequently tracking is done, the more both the manager and direct report can stay on top of their performance efforts. Good performance measures enable employees to know how they are performing and also what changes or improvements they can make to improve their performance.

Conscientious use of these three critical elements can make the employee review process less prone to such surprises as "distortion" – the sometimes distorted views an employee has regarding their contribution or performance to the organization. To mitigate distortion, it is important to create a performance review process.

Making the Review Process Valid

With the three critical elements of performance review firmly in place, managers are now able to make the review process fair and productive for both the organization and the employee. To do so:

- Establish clear and results-oriented performance goals and objectives.
- Limit key performance expectations to six or fewer. This keeps the performance review process focused and easier to manage.
- Set out standards that describe performance that truly makes a contribution.
- Use a valid method of measuring employee performance that relates to the clearly established performance expectations.
- Rate the employee's performance against the set standards and avoid issues that are not relevant to those expectations or standards.

Key Takeaways

Great performance review skills are essential to becoming an effective and respected manager. The importance of being able to articulate and accurately measure actions necessary for doing a good job cannot be overstated. As a performance management tool, performance review skills directly impact an employee's self-esteem, motivation, commitment, confidence, loyalty and personal success. Setting clear performance expectations, establishing well-defined acceptable performance standards, and having clearly defined performance measures are critical to being an effective manager. The review process then becomes productive and equitable.

Chapter 7: Handling Difficult Situations: Tips and Guidance for Managers

Introduction

Not all situations that come before the manager will be easy to deal with. A main responsibility and obligation in a managerial capacity is to address and, many times, confront difficult and uncomfortable issues.

This chapter offers insights into the important skills necessary for handling workplace complaints, employee conflicts, and personal requests.

Addressing Workplace Complaints

> *What is important is to keep learning, to enjoy challenge, and to tolerate ambiguity. In the end there are no certain answers.*
>
> *– Martina Horner, president, Radcliffe College*

As a new manager, addressing employee complaints can be tricky. Often, during the first few months on the job, the new manager will not have enough information to determine the validity of complaints and/or provide effective solutions to valid complaints. An effective early approach is to:

1. Let the employee know they have been heard,
2. Get their “reasoning” for the complaint, and
3. Let them know it will be looked into.

This gives the new manager time to assess and separate the invalid gripes from the valid complaints, and to gather enough information to have an effective conversation about the issue.

Separating petty gripes from legitimate issues that hamper productivity is an important responsibility for managers. A good way to begin dealing with the complaint is to consider the following questions:

- Is the complaint valid? How will business results be affected if the complaint is considered?
- Can an adjustment be made to accommodate the worker without being unfair to and/or have negative effects on other employees?
- Is the complaint a legitimate complaint about the work area, or is the problem a result of personal issues or conditions relating only to the one who is complaining?
- Have recent changes been made that are causing the complaint? If so, was that change made with valid business reasons in mind?

What are the other consequences – positive and negative – as a result of the recent change?

Simultaneously, the manager needs to learn company rules and policies and understand the rationale behind them. Understanding the rationale is a key factor in effectively handling employee complaints, since the more a manager can relate the issue, policy or rule to business results, the more effective his/her response will be.

In the case where a manager does not agree with company policies or rules, the accepted approach is to avoid criticizing them in front of direct reports. As a member of management, it is the manager's obligation to uphold the rules and be able to articulate the reasons for the policy.

The most **ineffective** responses to complaints regarding policy or rules are:

- Because I said so.
- It's just the policy.
- Rules are rules – there's nothing I can do about it.

Tactics for Handling Employee Conflicts

People who work closely together don't always get along. Being in close proximity and needing to cooperate to complete most work, employees often cannot simply ignore each other when they don't get along. It is inevitable that a manager will be called upon to intervene when employees are in conflict with each other.

...the manager needs to set the tone by making cooperation ("playing well with others") a performance expectation.

To mitigate these situations, the manager needs to set the tone by making cooperation ("playing well with others") a performance expectation.

If direct intervention is necessary, talking to each person individually is the first step. When talking to the employees, the manager needs to avoid being drawn off the subject with side issues. If the side issue is valid, the manager needs to acknowledge it and deal with it at a later time. The second step is meeting with both parties. Have some options in mind before meeting with the co-workers in conflict. Advise them that their behavior is disruptive and corrective action may be necessary. Formal process is the next step. This entails laying out specific ground rules and ensuring clear, result-oriented performance expectations.

If individuals continue to not get along, if appropriate, try avoiding assigning work where the two parties will not have to work closely together, or adjusting their work locations so they aren't physically near each other.

Transferring an employee may be an appropriate solution if the employee is performing at an acceptable performance standard. Transferring an employee whose work is poor to another supervisor is not an effective tactic and sends poor messages to co-workers.

Handling Personal Requests

Nothing affects the credibility and integrity of a manager more than recommendations for promotions or raises.

Promotions and Raises. Nothing affects the credibility and integrity of a manager more than recommendations for promotions or raises. Who gets promoted and who gets raises communicates clearly what the organization and supervisor values regarding employee performance and conduct.

In regard to raises, a manager must prepare in order to be knowledgeable. Most importantly, the manager must have a good understanding of a direct report's performance (see Chapter 6: *Great Performance Review Skills*). Also, the manager needs:

- Knowledge of local industry average pay scales.
- Knowledge of company policy regarding raises, merit increases, or bonuses.
- Specific criteria that must be met to earn a raise.
- A well-defined personal philosophy regarding raises, merit and performance.

In regard to promotions, the manager needs to know and be able to articulate what performance characteristics and interpersonal factors would lead to a promotion recommendation.

Time Off. While vacation time can be planned for and illness is unavoidable, unscheduled requests for time off can be difficult to deal with. Issues to be considered when granting time off include:

- Company policy – the specifics.
- Precedents – What are you willing to live with – with this employee and other employees in the future?
- Productivity – What impact will your decision have on the job result of this employee and others?
- Past history – What is the history with this employee regarding time off from work?

- Urgency of need for time off – What is the nature of the request? Is it an emergency and something impossible to deal with at another time?

Respond appropriately, with considerations such as whether the employee is not following vacation policy, has no time on the books, prior requests by other co-workers that compete with the request, the employee has too many previous requests, a work-related need is urgent, or you are short-handed. If the employee continues to be insistent, put the burden back on him/her by noting that it is the employee's responsibility to give appropriate advance notice – excluding valid emergencies.

Effective managers don't want to be perceived as a soft touch but they also don't want to be perceived as unreasonable. Having a consistent rationale regarding time off policies is important.

Key Takeaways

Difficult situations, such as handling workplace complaints, employee conflicts and personal requests, never take a break. The ability to handle difficult situations, articulate the reasons for policy and rules, and clearly demonstrate one's own personal stance on these issues, increases the manager's credibility and predictability. Gaining the basic skills to address these situations is a prerequisite for becoming an effective supervisor.

Chapter 8: How to Handle Performance Problems: Tips and Guidance for Managers

Introduction

Holding employees accountable creates consistent clarity for performance expectations – and is an important element of a motivating work environment. For managers, the decision to either address or ignore performance problems is a career-defining moment. If poor performance is tolerated, employees learn that:

A primary reason good people get de-motivated is the result of having to work side-by-side with those who don't carry their weight, and having the manager tolerate the low performance.

- It's okay for people to do less than their best.
- It's okay for people to fall short of expectations if they have an excuse.
- It's okay for people not to do what they said they would do.

Under-management of consequences is a fatal trap in which a supervisor or manager finds him or herself in a cycle of limitations, decreasing the quality of work life.

However, performance problems that are handled properly can lead to tremendous management success.

Confronting Poor Performance

The DESC Intervention Model can help managers balance the paradoxical nature of holding individuals accountable for performance while simultaneously maintaining positive relationships – balancing task issues and people issues.

When a manager needs to address a performance problem or situation by asking an employee to change behavior in some way, the employee is usually not happy to hear the negative information and can easily become defensive. Using the DESC Intervention Model (describe the specific situation (D), clarify the effect of the situation (E), state specific future expectations (S) and communicate consequences (C)) focuses performance problem discussions on the behavior and performance standards and avoids judgments about the person.

Step 1: Describe

Knowing that people often react to uncomfortable situations by becoming defensive or angry, the manager needs to first get the other party to agree to the performance facts.

- Specifically state the performance facts – the gap between what is expected and the employee's behavior and performance results.
- Keep it manageable in scope – stick to the current performance issue and don't bring past issues into the conversation.
- Avoid commenting on their motive, intent, or personal characteristics.
- Gain agreement from the employee on the performance facts – the gap between actual and desired performance – before moving on with the discussion.

It is natural to want to explain or justify poor performance, but if the employee attempts to talk about other issues or reasons for the performance gap, avoid that discussion until there is agreement that the performance in question is unacceptable.

Step 2: Effect

It is important to do some homework before having a discussion regarding the impact of present performance.

It is important to do some homework before having a discussion regarding the impact of present performance. Identifying how the performance problem affects customers, team members, cost, quality and/or other departments is critical to addressing the "So what?" question that gives performance problem discussions legitimacy. It gives performance feedback the credibility and importance that doesn't get delivered when the "impact" of poor performance is absent. Again, keep it:

- Specific – the measureable impact.
- Legitimate – show the clear connection between performance and impact.
- Succinct – as concise as possible.

Step 3: State

In the "State" stage of the DESC model, the manager needs to deliver clear future performance expectations using "I" statements. Avoid disguised "I" statements that ascribe motive, intent, or personal characteristics. For example, a good "I" statement is: "The production group is behind their schedule because they are not receiving the quality data they need every day. I need you to ensure that you get the quality data in before 3 p.m. every day." A bad "I" statement is: "I feel that you lack the initiative necessary for this job – you need to do the job the right way so others can rely on you."

An effective method for delivering "I" statements is:

- State the impact of the present problem.
- Clearly communicate feelings – when appropriate.
- State expectations.
- Make it crystal clear what is expected in the future and, if necessary, provide a timeline for performance improvement.

It is always helpful if the action steps for correcting the situation come out of the employee's mouth – not the manager's or supervisor's. This last step makes it more likely that the employee is committed to changing their behavior.

Step 4: Consequences

Your job as a manager is to increase the odds that the performance will improve.

Clearly spelled-out consequences are a necessary part of the process. Ensure the employee understands his or her responsibility for improvement efforts and clearly explain the consequences for failure to improve or change performance and what the consequences will be for positive improvement or change. One of three things will result from performance problem conversations: The performance will either improve, remain the same, or deteriorate. Your job as a manager is to increase the odds that the performance will improve. If it doesn't, following up on the consequences is a critical management responsibility. Using idle threats or not following through with consequences will define the supervisor and manager in the rest of the team's eyes.

Through appropriate consequences, managers can either build or erode their power – their ability to influence their group.

Key Takeaways

Choosing to either ignore or address a performance problem is a watershed moment in a manager's career. Ignoring the performance problem creates a poorly performing culture. However, managers who successfully navigate the challenges of dealing with employees who are performing at an unacceptable level create a culture where good performance is honored while at the same time increasing their respect, credibility and influence. Managers can use the DESC Intervention Model to balance task issues and people issues:

- describe the specific situation (D)
- clarify the effect of the situation (E)
- state specific future expectations (S)
- communicate consequences (C)

Chapter 9: Supervising Difficult Direct Reports: Tips and Guidance for Managers

Introduction

It is an unpleasant but true fact of life that supervisors and managers frequently deal with direct reports – or others – who deliberately try to make life difficult. Other times, an employee's behavior, such as absenteeism, tardiness, constant complaining or violation of compliance issues will necessitate a quick, effective and firm intervention on the part of the manager. Managers or supervisors who don't know how to handle these difficult situations can quickly lose their credibility and effectiveness. This chapter will discuss:

New supervisors and managers frequently deal with direct reports – or others – who deliberately try to make life difficult

- How to deal with persistent trouble makers.
- How to respond effectively to grievances.
- Tactics for dealing with problematic issues such as absenteeism, tardiness, sexual harassment, and outside problems.
- Handling "rush requests" and crises.
- Addressing workplace complaints.

Trouble Makers

Unfortunately, there are times when an employee may purposefully try to make a manager look ineffective or foolish. The employee may not cooperate with the manager's requests or else repeatedly challenge the authority of the manager. He or she might also complain constantly about the manager's competence, try to get under the manager's skin or try to "win" in some fashion.

The correct way for a manager to respond to inappropriate comments or actions is to:

- Use a firm tone of voice.
- Avoid anger. Keep your "cool."
- Allow no argument. Keep focused on the issue.
- If necessary, articulate the consequences of this negative behavior.

Usually, confronting the issue directly and in a timely fashion either stops the behavior or else drives it underground. If the negative behavior goes underground, the manager needs to stay aware and begin formal disciplinary action when the opportunity presents itself.

An important key for the manager to remember is not to fight, argue or play the employee's "game." In addition, he or she needs to deal with the situation, not simply hope it will go away on its own. Other employees will be watching closely to see how the supervisor deals with these difficult situations and people. If the difficult situation is not dealt with, more difficult problems with that employee and others will arise down the road, and the supervisor will have even less legitimate authority to deal with those problems. Supervisors may be tempted to simply transfer the difficult employee to some other department. While tempting, this is never a good solution since the manager will have effectively been held "ransom" by the bad behavior and will have even provided a reward for bad behavior. A downward spiral begins whereby others will see the manager as weak, and he or she will begin to cultivate a poor reputation at the company. High performers become demotivated and the performance culture suffers.

If the difficult situation is not dealt with, more difficult problems with that employee and others will arise down the road

Handling Grievances

No matter what the subject or context of the grievance, there is a prototypical standard practice that managers can follow to enhance the chances of a satisfactory resolution:

- Listen carefully and ask for clarification to make sure you fully understand the nature of the grievance.
- If the matter requires getting further information from others – let the employee know that the matter will be looked into and that a prompt response will be forthcoming. It is important to keep in mind that many times the employee putting forth the grievance is actually part of the problem. Knowing all the sides to the story is a critical part of the process.
- If the grievance is at all serious, discuss it with your boss and H.R.
- Once all the relevant information is gathered, consider all possible options for the resolution.
- Select the best option, dialogue with the direct report about that option avoiding a "this or nothing" approach.
- Implement the solution once agreement is reached. However, agreement is not required as the manager is the boss.
- Follow up later to ensure the issue has been solved.

On occasion, employees may feel uncomfortable bringing a grievance directly to the boss and would rather talk to H.R. If the employee isn't overtly attempting to undermine the supervisor's position or authority, it is appropriate to provide access to the alternative source.

Tardiness and Absenteeism

Being at work when required is a condition of employment – not a performance issue. Performance has to do with the quality or quantity of the performance that an employee completes. There is no performance when the employee is not at work. Managers need to let employees know that they must adhere to the organization's policies on time off, what to do when absent, and the policies regarding vacation time.

The simple practice of having to explain directly to a manager why someone will be late or absent often stops frivolous absenteeism.

In addition, a good personal rule to follow is to require employees to talk directly to you as the manager whenever they will be late or absent and not simply leave voice or text messages or tell co-workers. The simple practice of having to explain directly to a manager why someone will be late or absent often stops frivolous absenteeism.

Tardiness guidelines include:

- Make sure all employees know your expectations about being on time and leaving early. This should be done at one meeting so everyone has the same specific message.
- Let employees know that it is their responsibility to take measures that allow them to be on time to work and to leave on time.
- Don't ignore a tardiness or early departure. It is another defining moment and can impact a manager's credibility with others.
- Differentiate the issue when the employee does not call or make requests about issues regarding time away from the job vs. situations where they come to the manager for time off requests.
- If the issue is chronic, or if there is no change to the pattern, take formal action according to organizational policies.

Sexual Harassment/Hostile Work Environment

A hostile work environment is unwelcome behavior of any sort that makes an employee feel uncomfortable, fearful or powerless, or interferes with their work. Sexual harassment can happen to anyone – male or female, student or adult employee. Instances can include language, non-verbal communication or even pictures or displays that make people feel uncomfortable or self–conscious; overt, unwanted flirting; and comments regarding performance that have a gender basis.

Zero tolerance regarding sexual harassment and/or a hostile work environment should be the rule. If an issue does come up, the manager should never attempt to cover it up. Instead, immediately inform the boss. Depending on the severity of the situation, you may want make sure that the employee has stated that the offending behavior is unwelcome and let the offending employee know that any future behavior will result in formal action.

Outside Problems

At times, an employee's problems outside the workplace will interfere with his or her work. At that point in time, it is critical that the manager not try to become a counselor to the employee. Instead, the manager needs to:

- Clarify expectations and standards (in other words, what is this employee responsible for and what does good work look like?) Hold the employee accountable for normal performance expectations.
- If performance continues to slip, offer help through your organization's Employee Assistance Program (EAP) representative.
- Be willing to be flexible, to the degree possible, if the worker chooses EAP/human resource assistance.
- Take recommendations from an EAP or H.R. representative as to what can be done to help the employee get back on track.
- If the person refuses to seek assistance, the manager needs to be clear that no flexibility will be given and that there will be no tolerance for performance below an acceptable standard.
- Monitor performance closely (daily or weekly) and follow through with the organization's formal process if there is no effort to turn the performance around.

Developing the ability to skillfully handle unwelcome situations is a valuable talent and a worthwhile undertaking.

Rush Requests and Crises

There will always be situations at any organization that trump the normal work processes. However, it is incumbent on the manager to learn the work requirements so that he/she can tell the difference between a legitimate "rush request" or emergency and requests from individuals for their personal interest. Follow the following process:

- Verify the legitimacy of the request. Who is driving the change?
- Keep the boss informed.
- Ask questions to fully understand the nature and impact of the request and why other work has to be put on delay.
- When the request comes from the boss, ask questions and let the boss know the tradeoffs.
- If meeting the commitment requires support from others, document it in notes or email, and let those who must help meet the request know the deadlines for their support and the business consequences of failure to furnish the necessary support.
- Stay on top of progress, provide timely status reports to the boss, and be prepared to provide instant status reports at any time.

Key Takeaways

A manager may encounter a number of unpleasant or difficult situations, from persistent troublemakers to problematic issues such as absenteeism, tardiness, sexual harassment, and outside problems. Developing the ability to skillfully handle these unwelcome situations is a valuable managerial talent.

The main points for managers to remember are:

- Handle trouble makers in a firm and timely manner.
- Get the facts first regarding grievances – then handle them consistently.
- Treat absenteeism and tardiness seriously and promptly.
- Maintain a zero tolerance approach to sexual harassment.
- Never play counselor for an “outside problem.”
- Learn to differentiate between a legitimate emergency and someone who simply wants their work done first.

Chapter 10: The Manager's Guide to Understanding Influence and Power

"Nearly all people can stand adversity, but if you want to test a person's character, give them power."

–Abraham Lincoln

Introduction

The two key resources supervisors and managers have for managing the performance of others is their time and their influence. This chapter will discuss influence – the ability to effectively motivate employees through the appropriate use of social power.

Social power is a person's influence potential. It is the resource that enables a person to induce compliance or gain commitment from others. Appropriate use of social power by managers establishes their character, integrity, and credibility. Without using social power appropriately, managers can't manage effectively. The two sources of social power available to any manager or supervisor are position power and personal power.

Position Power

Position power is inherent in the title or position a manager holds in the organization. It is power that is given to the leader by the organization. This power comes from the use of performance appraisals, formal rewards, discipline, job assignment, promotions or recommendations for promotions, and merit increases. The three elements of position power are: reward power, coercion power, and legitimate power.

Reward power is the ability to deliver positive consequences and remove negative consequences in response to another's behavior. Reward power includes the ability to promote, provide formal recognition, influence financial rewards, and assign duties.

Coercion power is the ability to mete out negative consequences and discipline. Coercion power includes invoking financial sanctions, demotions, making assignments, holding people accountable for performance, and recommending disciplinary procedures.

Legitimate power is given to the manager by the nature of his/her position in the organization. It confers the authority on the leader to do things such as set standards, establish goals and objectives, and provide performance feedback.

Over-reliance on position power gains only compliance. However, without having or using position power wisely, accountability for performance is lost – creating an environment where poor performers work the system and high performers look for other opportunities.

Personal Power

Commitment is the result of effective personal power.

Personal power resides in the leader – his/her personal qualities. It is power given to the leader by others as a result of confidence in and respect for the leader. This power comes from establishing integrity, truthfulness, a sense of fair play, character, likeability, competence, expertise, and the use of information. Effective use of personal power results in commitment on the part of employees. If a manager lacks personal power, his/her credibility and integrity are hindered – as is the ability to teach and coach.

The three elements of personal power are: expert power, referent power, and information power.

Expert power is based on the degree to which a person displays special or superior knowledge or skill as it relates to specific areas of expertise and to specific goals or objectives.

"The fundamental concept in social science is power, in the same sense in which energy is the fundamental concept in physics."
–Bertrand Russell

Referent power comes from the respect, integrity, and personality characteristics that others find admirable in a person. Referent power is based on characteristics of honesty, fairness, rapport, acknowledgement and character.

Information power relates to having information or access to information that others deem valuable. This power base is leveraged on two variables: the degree the valued information is not available anywhere else and the means by which a person doles out information.

Key Takeaways

Power is not a dirty word when it comes to management. It is a necessary skill that must be developed and sustained. If a manager or supervisor is able to use his/her position and personal power effectively, the manager will increase his/her influence potential over the performance of others, thereby gaining more respect, credibility and power within the organization.

Chapter 11: Performance Coaching Flexibility: Every Great Manager Has It

Introduction

Effective performance coaching is a critical managerial skill. A leader needs to clearly understand what his or her direct reports are asked to do, and help give their team the confidence that they can accomplish those tasks and responsibilities. In order to do this, the manager must accurately diagnose the employee's performance needs and then adopt a complimentary coaching style that meets those needs. Managers who can't be flexible and adaptable in their coaching style can't hope to meet the variety of performance situations that come their way.

Identifying Performance Needs

While performance review considers the whole body of work, effective coaching requires looking specifically at the task or assignment in question.

First, the manager needs to break the employee's performance down into specific tasks – effective coaching requires this step. Once the performance issue is identified in task-specific terms, the second critical step in effective coaching is diagnosing the employee's performance level. An employee's performance level can be broken down into:

- **Results:** Performance results as they relate to acceptable standards for anyone in that specific job function. Are the employee's performance results well below standard, below standard, at or slightly above standard, or consistently well above standard?
- **Ability:** Does the employee have the skill to accomplish the task at the acceptable standard? Could he or she do it if they had to? Often supervisors will confuse enthusiasm, potential or capability with ability. Ability refers to current performance – not the ability to learn to perform. If the performance issue is a true ability problem, then anything other than training will not suffice – and even cause more difficulties.
- **Attitude:** The combination of the employee's *confidence* (to learn and/or work independently) that they can accomplish the required performance and the employee's *commitment* (desire) to accomplish the required performance. For a manager, an employee suffering from a lack of confidence and one who is just not

committed to the job can look the same: they can both lack initiative, seem hesitate, and wait to be told what to do. Yet, determining the difference between confidence and commitment issues is critical in determining the right coaching style.

Coaching Styles

"It does very little good to try to 'motivate' an employee in an effort to influence good performance when they don't have the ability."

–Dr. Julie White, *People Leave Managers – Not Organizations*

Now that you have diagnosed the results, ability, and attitude of your direct report, four performance levels are possible. Each level has an appropriate corresponding coaching style.

Performance Level 1

Performance results are below acceptable standard – employee might or might not have the ability – and lacks commitment and/or confidence for the task. *Coaching Style: Structure*. This style provides high amounts of structure, teaching and direction and little involvement and autonomy.

Performance Level 2

Performance results that are below acceptable standard – employee might or might not have the ability – but has commitment for the task and the confidence to learn and perform. *Coaching Style: Structured Involvement.* This style provides a high amount of structure and direction and high amounts of involvement, and participation – but not autonomy.

Performance Level 3

Performance results at or above the acceptable standard – employee has the ability to perform the task – lacks either commitment for the task or confidence to do the task independently – or both. *Coaching Style: Involved Autonomy*. This style provides low amounts of structure and direction and high amounts of involvement, and some autonomy.

Performance Level 4

Sustained superior performance for the task – possesses the ability to perform – and has both commitment for the task and a high level of self-confidence. *Coaching Style: Autonomy*. This style provides very low structure and direction, moderate involvement, and high autonomy.

Key Takeaways

Each employee is an individual, so managers need to demonstrate flexibility in their coaching methods. Leaders need a clear understanding of what direct reports' tasks are, and whether their team members are able to accomplish those tasks. Managers should break the employee's performance down into specific tasks for optimally effective coaching. Then, when the performance issue is identified, managers must diagnose the employee's performance level. The performance level will determine the most effective coaching style.

Chapter 12: Initiative, Personal Responsibility, and Delegation

"I believe the ability to delegate effectively is one of the most important skills a manager can have. However, I've seen managers encounter several problems when attempting to delegate!"

–Ken Blanchard, author of *The One Minute Manager*

Introduction

Learning the basic skills for creating initiative in the workplace – specifically preventing upward delegation and effectively delegating appropriate tasks and assignments – is a critical skill all successful managers must learn. Managers or supervisors who fail to develop these skills can easily find themselves in the trap of doing for employees what employees can and should be doing for themselves. The reasons for doing this are varied – anything from incorrect ideas of the role of the manager, to the need for control, to providing inappropriate "help" to employees.

Supervisors and managers who haven't thought through these issues can inadvertently hinder the development of initiative and personal responsibility in their employees. Under the guise of "helping their employees," supervisors and managers step in and do the work that is the employee's responsibility. The downstream consequence is the erosion of talent, bench strength, and employee development and motivation. An additional unintended consequence is a waste of the manager's time.

Managers are responsible for (1) doing their own work and (2) managing the work of others. Time spent managing others must be spent with purpose and focus – not doing the employee's work. Leveraging supervisory time wisely is a must. A manager or supervisor who is unable to leverage their time will also lose their influence over their employees – making the job much more difficult.

Preventing Upward Delegation

We all know about the managerial saying, "a monkey on my back," coined by William Oncken Jr. years ago. A "monkey" is defined as the work to be done. For managers, doing the employee's work – upward delegation – is taking on "inappropriate monkeys."

There are several reasons managers accept monkeys:

- I can do it better.
- I can do it faster.
- I've done it before and I enjoy it.

- I don't really trust the employee to do it right.
- The employee might not know how to do it.

Regardless of the rationale or good intention, these ways of thinking create a situation where the supervisor must continue to do the employees' work. The employee can't learn or develop, and the manager must waste critical management time that could have been spent on the manager's more critical responsibilities.

Taking the work that others should be doing as a result of incorrect notions of the role of manager, the need for control, and the need to be seen as helpful, creates a cycle of dependency upon the manager.

While well-intended, taking employees' "monkeys" leads to very negative unintended consequences:

- Employees are not developed.
- Employees learn to bring everything to the boss rather than make an effort to work things through on their own.
- No innovation or creativity in how tasks get done – manager does it his/her old way.
- Responsibility and accountability for work is shifted from employee to supervisor.

Perhaps the most negative result of doing work that employees should be doing is the creation of a culture of dependency – where the employee depends on the manager to tackle all the tough issues, get things done, and make all the decisions. This is the antithesis to superior performance, and it erodes personal initiative and responsibility in the workplace. Initiative and responsibility are highly desired employee qualities, and managers can often be unaware that they are inadvertently discouraging initiative and responsibility.

Assigning Work and Initiative

The primary goal when it comes to assigning additional work or responsibilities is to be equitable – fair to each direct report. The temptation, of course, is to overload good employees with more than their fair share of assignments, because you know they can be counted on, while your poor performers are skipped over.

For "same jobs with same pay," the additional work relevant to that job should be assigned to everyone in turn. If this is not done, the less skilled or demotivated employees will never develop initiative and the top performers will be over-burdened. This is not effective talent management.

Now, of course, the manager needs to be prepared for resistance or excuses from employees. Assigning work to just those who don't have excuses won't develop "bench strength." When cooperation is needed from everyone in the department, accepting excuses leads employees to believe that the manager is a pushover – and legitimacy in the managerial position is compromised.

Here are some of the excuses a supervisor might hear, with appropriate responses:

Excuse	Response
"Fred usually does that job."	"That may be true, but I would like to ensure that everyone in the group takes on a variety of assignments."
"No one has taught me how to do that yet."	"Then this is a good time to learn how. I will work with you this time so you can get up to speed."
"I'm swamped – can't you find someone else who's not busy?"	"Everyone is busy, and this time I need you to do it. You can be sure everyone else will get additional assignments routinely."
"If I do that, I'll have to put off some other things I'm doing."	"I understand. Let's talk about what things can be put off short- term and what can't. Everyone has to balance their workload at times."

Helping is not doing other's work for them

Caution: a manager needs to take the time to determine the validity of these excuses. The risk of being wrong is higher until he or she gets to know the people and the routine. And if, in the process, a supervisor discovers that extremely competent and cooperative people have had an undue burden placed on them, then the supervisor needs to stop that process and replace it with a system where work is distributed evenly and fairly.

Assigning Overtime

Overtime assignments often come into play for managers or supervisors. Some potential pitfalls that managers should avoid when assigning overtime are:

- Assigning overtime just because people don't accomplish what they should during normal working hours.
- Using overtime as a reward or punishment – as this can easily lead to discriminatory issues and/or perceptions of favoritism.
- Scheduling that doesn't consider the particular wants and needs of employees.

Often, there are enough people who want overtime to fill overtime requirements without imposing on those who don't. However, when overtime demand requires a manager to juggle the schedule, here are some guidelines to help.

- Using a rotation is a good way to ensure fairness.
- Don't rotate for the sole purpose of rotation if you have plenty of people to fill overtime needs and some who don't want overtime.
- Allow workers to fill in for each other as long as you are kept informed.
- Don't allow overtime unless the appropriate amount of work is being done during regular hours.
- Don't allow overtime to become an expected entitlement (if it is not part of the routine or the job description).
- Post overtime schedules as far ahead as possible.
- Whenever possible, try to accommodate workers who will be inconvenienced or burdened by overtime.
- When overtime is a normal part of the job, ensure all applicants are aware of this.

Delegating Work – To Delegate or Not

Before delegating, get to know the specific job responsibilities for each person and have a good feel for their performance.

All effective supervisors and managers have learned to delegate effectively. They have learned that delegation is a tool that both leverages their time and their influence, and develops employees. However, before delegating, the manager needs to go slowly – getting to know the specific job responsibilities for each person – and have a good feel for their performance.

Managers should adapt their delegation practices according to the experience, performance, and attitude of the direct report. Effective diagnosing of these elements in each situation is a critical skill in any management practice.

By using a Performance Level Scale, a manager can determine the amount of delegation to be used. **Level 1** is for employees with low ability/experience and low confidence or commitment. This employee can be delegated to, but will need structure and should advise the manager or supervisor before taking specific actions. This ensures that decisions, initiative and performance move in a positive direction.

Level 2 is for an employee with moderate ability/experience and moderate confidence/commitment. Managers can delegate in this situation by requiring the employee to initiate the action and requiring immediate briefing of the action taken.

Level 3 is for employees with excellent ability/experience and high confidence/commitment. Managers can delegate by providing the autonomy and control over action and decisions – requiring periodic updates from the direct report to keep in the loop.

Tasks to delegate include:

- Routine tasks and assignments that swallow up a manager's or supervisor's time
- Tasks and assignments that develop direct reports and allow them upward mobility
- Tasks and assignment that provide effective cross training of direct reports – enabling the manager to gain more flexibility

Things not to delegate:

- Critical managerial or supervisor job responsibilities
- Only the unpleasant duties and tasks
- Poor workers' duties to good workers

When thinking of whom to delegate to, consider the following:

- Everyone – for purposes of cross training
- Those who desire development opportunities
- For the purpose of developing a particular competency in the group
- Everyone on a rotational basis for routine duties and tasks
- Anyone being groomed for other positions

While delegating, follow this process:

- Provide clarity about what you want done. Be specific and provide any needed instructions – in writing if lengthy.
- Provide clarity about deadlines for completion. Try to match the work with the capabilities of the employee. Don't hesitate to provide challenging assignments.
- Provide any necessary authority required to get the assignment done.
- Ensure the employee has access to you for assistance.
- Provide specific checkpoints when the assignment is lengthy.
  Be specific in your follow-up. Progress reports need to be about specific progress related to results– not a summation of tasks and assignments being worked on.
- Provide feedback on performance when assignment is completed.

Key Takeaways

When it comes to job responsibilities, a manager's ability to delegate work and get the most from employees is a hallmark of being a great leader. Effective delegation builds personal responsibility and initiative in employees; poor delegation can stall their development while overburdening leaders with added work. Once a manager has a good understanding of employees' job requirements and skill sets, he or she can prevent upward delegation and effectively delegate appropriate tasks and assignments based on employee performance level.

About the Supervisory Basics Training Series

The Supervisory Basics Training Series is based on extensive analysis of the competencies required of transitioning individual contributors and seasoned, but untrained, supervisors. This series provides the knowledge, tools and skills to immediately establish a leadership role and helps participants understand how to avoid the typical traps of supervisors and managers.

The Supervisory Basics Training Series helps managers understand the management behaviors and tactics required to ensure their own and their company's success. The result is managers establishing themselves in a legitimate position of power, inspiring superior performance and promoting open, effective communication.

Supervisory Basics also helps managers avoid common traps – lack of clarity in expectations, ineffective communications, not establishing personal power and failing to move from "doer" to leader. Such negative behaviors lead to absenteeism, low morale, and lost productivity and customer loyalty, as well as increased attrition.

The series consists of 12 individual yet linked two-hour modules, delivered in leader-led or eLearning formats. Companies can choose flexible implementation, including an integrated 3-day series, stand-alone sessions, mix and match, and external facilitator or train-the-trainer options. Participants will learn to build credibility, establish legitimate position power, earn personal power, "manage up," understand legal basics and conduct purposeful workplace discussions. Download the brochure.

About Impact Achievement Group

Impact Achievement Group is a training and performance management consulting company that provides assessments, coaching, story-based interactive workshops, and simulations for managers at all levels of organizations worldwide. Impact Achievement Group helps companies dramatically improve management and leadership competency for bottom-line results. Company experts Rick Tate and Julie White, Ph.D. are internationally recognized authorities in leadership development, human performance, customer-focused business strategies and workplace communications. Visit the website.