

maintaining employee performance

Keeping your team focused and motivated

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In brief

Performance appraisal is a contentious topic. A great deal of effort goes into tying this down to a tight formula, yet those formulas often work against what an employee needs for direction and motivation. There is plenty of evidence that performance appraisal systems work against motivation, not for it.

The key to motivating people is to have a real dialogue with them. This is not an instruction session. Rather it is one where you need to listen as much as respond. Focus first on what is going right, or what the employee's strengths are, rather than zeroing in on a problem.

Instead of filling out a form, or ticking the required boxes, engage the employee. Ask them how they see their job. Ask them to rate themselves on their performance in various aspects of their job. Look at where they could they are having some success, however limited, and see where this can be applied elsewhere in their responsibilities. Have a conversation about how you can lift performance, maintain it or take it to the next level.

This sort of approach can sound woolly, but not if you follow a few simple rules.

The following pages walk through straightforward steps you can take to develop your team rather than simply appraise them.



Performance agenda

Simple steps for positive appraisals



Limit your responsibilities

Fewer appraisals means stronger mentoring

You cannot effectively mentor masses of people. Try to keep the number of people you help to a manageable number, preferably a single digit figure. Focus on those you feel you can really support. Help your immediate reports to develop their own appraisal techniques and delegate responsibility to them.



Always take notes

You will not remember everything

People appreciate it when you clearly remember the issues they face. Take notes which make clear the content, style and outcome of each session. Refer to them periodically. Use them as a reminder of the person's profile when you are dealing with them on a day-to-day basis.



Start with positives

Build a platform for a dialogue

Look first to the positive things the person does. Even if they score only four out of ten, something got them to four. Compliment them on that. Look at what got them there. Talk about how they could build on that. Note any achievements, no matter how minor.



What is their role?

Do you both fully understand it?

If this is a first session, ask the employee how they see their role. What do they think their key task is? How do they see their contribution to the business? Together, work out the various elements of their responsibilities and develop an informal description of their job.



Self assessment

Ask them how they think they are going

Get the employee to rate themselves in the various elements of their job. What's going right? How might they take that experience and apply it to other areas? Don't look for problems. Maybe they are simply getting on with it very well, but ask if there are areas where they think they could improve.



Offer assistance

How can you assist their development?

Could they use further training in specific areas? Are they being given the resources required to do the job? Do they get support from colleagues? Do they need more? Ask the employee for suggestions.



Plan for development

If action is required, make a simple plan

You now have a clear job description and possibly some mutually agreed areas where the role could be further developed. Together, articulate a specific action that you could take in one or more of these areas. Ensure that this can be done in simple steps and that the first one is immediately actionable.



Plan for review

Ensure you close with a clear understanding

It may well be that there is nothing to be done, but if there is, have a timeline for its execution and schedule the next session. Do not make it too soon. Let the employee work out their own pace, but make it clear you are available for consultation if required. Agree to take immediate action on the first step of any plans you have formulated – and do so. Tell them you are looking forward to seeing the results and close by thanking them for their input.



For more information, visit my website www.alanhargreaves.com

Hi, I'm Alan Hargreaves. I specialise in simplifying complex business problems. In over 35 years as a business executive, I have never found an issue that cannot be addressed through identifying the essential but simple steps required to make any problem manageable. It might be your career, your firm, your team or your strategy. It doesn't matter. All hurdles can be lowered through dispassionate analysis, and all executives can embrace simple processes to take them forward.

Using these techniques, I have helped hundreds of people through the various stages of their business or career development. It may be the challenge of taking on new responsibilities; it could be the task of managing a business you have created yourself; it may be handling a difficult team in the midst of major change. I use a straightforward combination of key principles to get results: collaboration, adaptation, simplification and action. You can contact me anytime at alan@alanhargreaves.com.



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