

If You Can't See It, They Won't Do It: Creating a High Performance

Team

By Della Menechella

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Recently, while developing a customer service program, I asked my client to provide me with detailed descriptions of behaviors he wanted his team members to engage in. He called me back a short time later and told me that his department heads were having a difficult time with the assignment. They knew what the employees were doing wrong, but they couldn't put into words what excellent performance looked like.

You may be saying to yourself, "Where did he find these managers? How could they not be able to describe acceptable behavior?" Actually, this situation is very common. Most team leaders know what they want their members to stop doing, but they aren't clear about what they want them to do instead. By following the steps listed below, you will have a clear plan to guide your members to outstanding performance.

Describe What It Looks Like - You need to get clarity about how you want your team members to act. Create a picture in your mind of what outstanding performance looks like. Concentrate on the actual behaviors that are involved. Don't use phrases like an excellent team member would have a good attitude. That leaves too much room for misinterpretation. Focus on the behavior. If team members had good attitudes, what would they do? How would they use their bodies, their voices, what actions would they be taking?

Choose The Most Critical Elements - Once you have listed the excellent behaviors, prioritize them. List the most critical behavior that absolutely must be done. Then list the second critical behavior, the third, etc. You will come up with a hierarchy of behavioral standards.

Communicate Your Expectations - Once you have determined the most important behaviors, you must let your staff know what is expected of them. One of the biggest reasons for poor performance is that team leaders are not effective in communicating expectations to their team. Most people want to do a good job. However, ideas of doing a good job are very subjective. You must clearly state the behavior that you expect. If there are areas where employees are weak, provide them with the necessary training to improve their skills.

Give Feedback - Let your team members know how they are doing. Provide both positive and constructive feedback. Don't wait for the annual evaluation. Feedback should be a continuous process. If a team member is performing at a high level, let him or her know. Often, we don't take

time to recognize good behavior, but that is wasting a very important motivational tool. People like to receive praise for a job well done. When they receive that praise, they are more likely to repeat the behavior. Let team members know when their behavior falls short of the mark. Again, focus on the behavior, not the personality. Describe the incorrect behavior and tell them the behavior that is expected. Once they begin to perform in the appropriate way, recognize and praise the new behavior.

Continue To Add New Behaviors - As team members become adept at key behaviors, it is time to add new ones to the level of expected performance. By setting up expectations in steps, it prevents staff members from feeling overwhelmed. It also allows them to experience the sweetness of success as they gain mastery over the previous skills.

So as you lead your team on a day-by-day basis, remember if you can't see what you want them to do, there is no way they will be able to do it. Follow this plan and you will discover that you have created a high performance team of which you can be proud.

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