

Creating a Communications Culture to Enhance Performance

By Manya Arond-Thomas

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A pervasive challenge in organizations today is the lack of performance management systems that support high-performance cultures. While there are a number of elements that support a performance culture, there are two powerful conversation tools that must provide the foundation for any solid performance management system - adequate and appropriate feedback mechanisms within the organization, and effective use of requests and promises.

The Gallup organization researched what makes a great workplace in a survey (the Q12) that involved 80,000 managers in a multi-year research project. The survey identified 12 dimensions that characterize a great workplace and positively impact employee retention, customer satisfaction, productivity and profitability. Significantly, six of the twelve dimensions reflect on the quality of communication within the organization and contribute to organizational climate, which in itself predicts 20-30% of business results. They are:

- I know what is expected of me at work.
- In the last week, I have received recognition or praise for doing good work.
- My supervisor, or someone at work, seems to care about me as a person.
- There is someone at work that encourages my development.
- In the last six months, someone at work has talked with me about my progress.
- At work, my opinion seems to count.

Create Adequate Feedback Mechanisms in Your Organization

Performance reviews are standard fare, yet research shows that most employees feel they do not receive adequate feedback on how they're doing, what's expected, what they need to do to improve, and how to be as successful as they

would like. There are several venues through which to give and get feedback: supervisory reporting relationships, 360 assessments, mentoring and coaching relationships.

Giving Effective Feedback:

1. Agree on goals and/or performance standards to be met.
2. Be descriptive, not evaluative
3. Give sufficient positive feedback
4. Beware of over-reliance on negative feedback.
5. Don't withhold negative critical information in order to avoid hassle.
6. Give ongoing feedback and be timely with respect to particular events or situations.
7. Give specific examples and guidelines rather than being vague and general.

Understand the Anatomy of Effective Requests and Promises

The purpose of communication in business is to make agreements on how we are going to take action to achieve the outcomes and results we want. What drives action and creates velocity are requests and promises. This is the lifeblood of business communication.

An effective request must contain three elements:

- Saying exactly what you want.
- Saying exactly when you want it.
- And saying exactly who you want it from

Note that the operative word here is exactly. The more precise you are in your requests, the greater the likelihood that you will get what you want or expect.

Certain actions, or lack thereof, create confusion, resentment, communication breakdown, and thus unmet goals. Common ways we sabotage our communications are by:

- Making unclear requests
- Not making requests
- Not communicating expectations
- Promising when unclear about the request
- Not declining requests
- Breaking promises without mending the break

If you need to improve performance in your organization, take a close look at the effectiveness of your organization's feedback mechanisms, and the skill level people have with these essential communication tools. With appropriate training supported by follow-on coaching, you can improve individual and organizational performance relatively quickly.

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