

INTENTIONALLY MANAGING PEOPLE

Intentionally managing people involves a continuum of activities that develops and sustains employees who together achieve the organization's mission and strategic objectives. You move along this continuum by:

- Hiring for talent, that is, proclivity and potential. (Knowledge and current skills are actually less important)
- Giving orientation, resources and help to new employees
- Giving ongoing supervision and help
- Holding regular meetings with each employee.

The wisdom that prevails right now is that leaders should meet quarterly with direct reports in order to reflect upon performance and set goals. Longer, annual meetings also include updating job descriptions. Why are these regular meetings important?

First, short, quarterly meetings with every direct report, as well as a longer annual meeting, allow you to put on-the-spot feedback in context. You and your employee search for patterns in that feedback. What do you each see as strengths and challenges? In areas where the employee is outstanding, ask her/him to identify what skills, knowledge and talents contribute to this excellence. What are areas of struggle, and why? Preparing for these performance meetings also invites you to assess the degree of importance of both positive and critical feedback in your day-to-day interaction.

Second, your conversations with direct reports provide you with your most direct opportunity to ensure that they understand how their jobs connect with business unit and organizational objectives. I have worked with a number of leaders whose progress toward strategic objectives was slowed because employees were not shown how to link their performance objectives with the organization's.

How do you align each job with business unit and organizational objectives? Before you prepare for annual performance meetings, ponder this: What job profiles or work functions do you need to have in place in order to take your unit or organization forward? Once you map this ideal configuration, you are in a better position to evaluate current job assignments. How are you and your people going to get from here to there? Do you see alignment of skills, knowledge and talent with the jobs people are currently doing? Do you have accurate information about the time it takes employees to perform their responsibilities well? Have you made it clear what your priorities are for these multi-tasking employees?

Research and my own experience show that, done right, people want to be supervised. They need consistency and predictability that includes on-the-spot feedback and planned performance meetings. Gallup research (see book title in sidebar) found that managers who lead their units or organizations to high performance never compromise on excellence, set clear expectations, give employees the resources to do their work right, give recognition and praise, encourage employee development, and contribute to environments where co-workers are committed to doing quality work.

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Performance Planning Ingredients

- Written, current job duties
- Written performance expectations
- Written development needs and goals
- Goal setting and monitoring meetings, held on a regular schedule

New questions for performance meetings

- Describe success in your current role. How would you measure it?
- What actions have you taken regarding your performance during this time period?
- What discoveries have you made?
- What are your goals for your current role?
- What is your main focus for the next quarter? The next year?

More resources

First Break All the Rules, by Buckingham & Coffman, is one of many research-based resources I use when I help clients set up and refine performance management practices, and when I coach leaders.