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## Disasters from Lack of Performance Management

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Of course every manager hopes that she will have a great performer who is self starting and self managing. You hope to avoid difficult performance problems, challenging performance reviews and terminations. Certainly I wish you the best on this and quite honestly, it does happen. The question always is, how often? In my experience after leading hundreds of seminars and coaching hundreds of managers: not often.

In my office, I am seeing more claims from employees that could have been averted through good performance management. Instead of managing performance, what is typical is some version of the following:

New Employee (NE) is welcomed into the workplace, shown the coffee, the bathrooms and the phones, asked to fill out a bunch of forms, receives minimal training and then told to get to work. NE struggles but is reluctant to ask for help. Her work suffers. Manager grouches to herself, her best friend, spouse or therapist but is too busy and/or lacks the skills to give the NE useful feedback. NE continues to struggle and make mistakes, although intermittently does good work. Manager is late on doing first performance review, rushes through it and gives NE the benefit of the doubt by giving her a good rating and minimal feedback.

NE continues to try to do the work but she needs help. She's embarrassed to ask for what she needs. Manager continues to complain to everyone *but* NE about her deficiencies. Several other performance reviews come and go without Manager giving NE the real performance feedback she needs to be successful.

Finally, some big performance problem happens and Manager wants to fire or lay off NE. HR or legal looks at performance reviews and says NO!

Manager is very sad. NE is confused.

How should this story have played out instead?

The manager should have started Managing performance from Day One.

## **Start Managing Performance from Day One**

### **Setting and Objectives**

From the first day on, you need to set concrete and specific goals and objectives so that your employees know what's expected and have them email back to you their understanding of what you want. Trust me you will be depressed when you see these and conclude that human communication is hopeless but it does help you clarify what you said.

Your objectives should be behaviorally specific: something that they can say or do. If it's not something that they can say or do, then it's not specific enough.

Check out the following examples:

#### **Vague**

Use good phone skills

Have a good attitude

Be persistent

#### **Behaviorally Specific**

Follow the written script

Show up on time; meet your daily call goals

Ask for the sale at least three times

If you have not set forth these kinds of behaviorally specific goals and objectives, you will find that it's very difficult to manage poor performance. It's

much easier for employees to exhibit quality work if they know specifically what you think good work looks like. It's much easier to create good performance if your workers have a clear vision in their own minds of what you're trying to accomplish.

Of course this requires you to do something that many managers have trouble accomplishing: have a clear vision themselves of their own goals and objectives. If you're not crystal clear on this in your own mind, you'll find it difficult for employees to do the same.

### **Follow-up**

Again, before you deal with poor performance, the ideal model would be for you to have clearly stated goals and objectives and then do a follow-up by having them email your understanding of what you said. This allows you to make sure that they understand what you're trying to say to them. If you have not done this before, the first step in managing poor performance is to start now.

### **One-on-Ones that Work**

You will need, of course, to follow that standard management mantra of "praising in public and criticizing in private." Find a quiet office or corner of the plant or shop and make sure that you're conversation cannot be overheard. No one likes to have their private business spread out all over the workplace and, in general, performance problems and other employee personnel issues should be kept confidential anyway.

Use this model:

- Clarify the performance issue.
- Outline the problem by getting straight to the point. Don't leave the employee wondering or hanging around trying to imagine what you're talking about.

- Be specific. Follow the examples above of behaviorally specific ways of acting and being. Employees cannot realistically respond to vague directives.
- Ask the employee what they think about what you've said and listen. Don't, however, get distracted from your main message if the employee starts dodging and weaving and offering a lot of excuses that you know are nutty.
- Repeat what the employee needs to do to improve. Repetition, repetition, repetition is the key here.
- PIP or email back. If your organization has a formal performance improvement plan (PIP) then you need to follow that structure and make sure that you dot all i's and cross all t's. If not, you can again instruct the employee to email back to you their understanding of what you want them to do. Once more, be prepared to have to go through several iterations before you get this one right.
- Set a Follow-up Meeting. You need to set a follow-up meeting, sometime soon. One week would be appropriate for some workplaces but certainly, no later than one month.
- Document, document, document. Be sure to document all steps in this process in your own management file. What to document? Just the facts, not your opinions, conclusions or assumptions.

If you follow these steps, you will spend more time managing good performance and have fewer performance disasters.