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Performance Management

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Setting Job Performance Standards

Megan Tough

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The success of your business is directly related to the commitment and productivity of the people who work in your business. And yet it is generally recognized that 60% of employees, or more, are underutilized in their roles at work.

So what are the factors that contribute to low performance standards and expectations?

Communication, or mis-communication, is one of the major sources of low productivity. The messages that move between the owner, employees, managers and even customers are not understood in the same way. One classic example is that business owners tend to assume that employees and managers see things the same way they do.

Managers tend to lower their expectations (unconsciously) so that they will not have to confront employees. Most people dislike discussing declining performance with their employees, and so actively avoid having to do so by reducing their expectations of what's required.

Employees have a tendency to protect themselves from possible failure by pushing back on what is expected. They will often negotiate/bargain the job down to a more comfortable level.

Business owners often have difficulty separating what they want done from how they want it done. Telling employees exactly how to achieve a certain goal leaves no room for the employee to think or use their own initiative.

Consequently they often stop trying to contribute and become "sheep" - just doing what they are told. In this catch-22 situation, the owner is forced into a position where they must constantly be telling everyone exactly what to do.

Some owners may not understand the concept of person/job matching, and so have the wrong people in the wrong positions. This situation can be extremely demotivating for the employee.

So how do you go about setting performance standards and expectations?

The owner and employee must collaborate together.

They must work together on the fact that the role the employee is performing can be improved in a way where everybody wins - the employee, the owner, and the business. When you teach the owner to collaborate with the employee, not only does the performance go up, but so does the morale.

Short term goals, or wins, must be established. 90-days is the ideal.

Set specific goals for the employee in 90-day increments so that there will be ample opportunity to monitor systems and progress, as well as to experience wins on a routine basis. Ideally, involve the employee in this goal setting process so they experience some control over their work.

Determine the strengths required to do the job well.

If the employee is going to be successful, the owner and employee must decide jointly what strengths are required, and how the employee is going to be able to apply their strengths. This is where having a good match between the employee and the job is so important. The boss doesn't have to figure this out on their own - the employee will probably already know what's necessary.

Set standards, and determine HOW they will be done.

Decide the standards that will apply to each activity, as well as how the standards will be achieved. Understanding the level of performance required gives the employee a sense of achievement - which is one of the key ingredients to achieving performance standards. This is true for employees at any level.

Establish communication agreements.

To ensure success, the owner and employee must decide at the outset how they are going to communicate progress (and challenges) along the way. Will it be day-to-day? Week-to-week? The minimum time frame is week-to-week. Less frequent than that and it all falls apart.

The employee decides how to achieve the desired results.

The owner will be present and participating for this part, but it is essential that the employee be leading the process in order for them to have ownership. Help the employee take responsibility for deciding how to accomplish the results.

You may need to determine if the employee has the skills and development to do this. If they don't, provide maximum guidance to them.

Get it in writing.

If it is not in writing, within one to two weeks everyone will be confused and uncertain. The focus, responsibility, resources, constraints, timetables and measures all need to be in writing. The purpose of doing this is to make sure the owner and employee are so clear on the goals and process that there is no confusion whatsoever. It sets everyone

Establish a monitoring method.

Make sure you get agreement on how the performance will be monitored and how frequently. In order for the process to go forward, the employee needs to agree to monitor their own performance, and the owner must agree to sit down and review it with the employee on a pre-determined schedule. Let them know upfront that if they get busy and start canceling meetings, performance will not improve and expectations will not be met.

I recommend having the employee keep track of their progress in writing and advise the owner weekly. A simple weekly progress update is a win-win solution and can take as little as 5 minutes. A monthly sit-down, face-to-face meeting is a must also.

What are the benefits of setting effective performance standards and expectations?

- * Employees are energized and empowered to take ownership of their positions.
- * Owners become energized and inspired, ceasing to lower expectations in order to avoid confrontation.
- * The productivity of the company goes up.
- * Everyone knows what is expected of them, which provides certainty to move forward.
- * This process, itself, opens new channels of communication between owners and employees

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About the Author :

Megan Tough is director of complete potential, a leadership and HR consultancy based in Sydney, Australia. At complete potential we understand people - what engages them, what encourages them to perform, and what drives them away. With over 20 years experience working on HR issues in business, our job is to help you make the most of your investment in people. To learn more visit www.completepotential.com

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Getting Over the Hump...

Tommy Yan

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Lino is a deacon at a local church. After he leads in prayer, his loving wife Juli remarks that he overuses the phrase "And, uh." And his word-searching pauses leave the congregation guessing and disconnected. She calls him on his stuff.

Juli is Lino's chief asset...

But after years of hearing her husband pray—he hasn't improved. He hasn't invested in the resources to develop his potential. He mentioned joining Toastmasters, but hasn't walked his talk.

Like many of us, we plan—but fail to execute. We massage our fragile egos hoping no one will ever call us on our stuff. We hide behind our strengths never realizing how powerful we can become if we worked through our weaknesses.

Ask me how many times I intended to attend a Toastmasters meeting and I'd reply, "At least a dozen." Ask me to join you swimming and I'd argue, "I'm not a fish."

I've made excuses, procrastinated, and did everything but. I attended seminars, bought CDs, and read books. I spent years rehearsing but never got on stage.

How about you?

What should you be doing that you wanted to accomplish last year? Did you really want to lose weight or did you want to try a new diet? Did you really want to meet your soul mate or did you want to dabble in another relationship?

Positive change won't happen by osmosis. You must take specific, disciplinary action. Often an uncomfortable one. It's like swimming upstream.

When I started to learn copywriting, I had to write out long drafts. Word for word. Some up to 40 pages long. Which took a week because of blisters.

Are you willing to pay the price?

If yes, here are seven keys to help you get over the hump:

1) Make an investment in you. I began with books, cassettes, and seminars. Today there are CDs, DVDs, iPods, and online resources. It's available. Just one call or one click away.

This is your genesis for positive programming. You install good programming into your mind to overcome years of negative programming. This will help you take better actions toward your personal goals.

When I began, I didn't want to spend one penny buying this stuff. I was a cheap bastard. But I learned the more I paid, the more I valued and got hooked on the information.

Let your friends invest in beer, television, and other self-defeating vices that smuggle their minds and wallets. You don't have to join them. The next key is...

2) Be mindful of your time with friends. I have a long distance relationship with my old friends. I keep them a long distance from me.

Most are doing well, but it's just superficial. Their lack of improvement has left them living lives of quiet desperation. They deserve limited time.

But for those who add value to my life, I grant them more time. For those whose creative juices stir mine, they have my attention.

3) Exorcise your excuses. I used to believe I wasn't talented, I'm too shy, I'm not good enough, or that's impossible. And get down on myself because I didn't know what it took to become a success.

But success is a muscle that must be continually developed and refined. Tiger Woods didn't reach the top by relaxing by the pool all day. He developed his skills daily.

And like a jacket that's no longer in style—you can take off those excuses and bury them in your closet.

4) Answer the questions from your heart—not just your head. I was in a coaching session with sales consultant Greg Renstrom. He asked me four questions. It took me about an hour to answer all four. Greg guided me to probe deeper and deeper into my soul to come up with answers and ideas that

blew us both away.

Prior to this, I glossed over these same four questions in a book and answered each in a few seconds. Being surface answers, they never gave me the breakthroughs I got from penetrating my soul.

To avoid answering or making decisions in haste, go to a place of silence. Breathe deeply. Close your eyes if you wish. Explore all the possibilities by expanding within. And be available when the answers arise.

5) Get a mentor or coach. That's easy. Learn from their triumphs and mistakes. There's nothing that can shortcut your learning curve faster. And pay them what they're worth. Great mentors and coaches deserve their fee.

Do an Internet search. Ask peers or associates. Sign up for newsletters. Purchase an introductory product. Listen to a teleconference. Visit their website. Enroll in their coaching program. And experience them live on the platform.

6) What's in it for you? Is it a fancy house in an exclusive neighborhood? Is it getting back at all those dream stealers to prove them wrong? Or maybe it's just to keep your job and a roof over your family's head.

When you know the reasons why—you can reach your destiny sooner.

But here's a stronger motivator: If you don't change course—you'll be at the same place one, five, and ten years from now. The same income, car, and annoying neighbors.

7) Take the first plunge. Nothing happens if you don't act. You can't improve by wishing. You don't get your dream date sitting at home dreaming about it.

I took the plunge by participating in a Speaking Circle. I needed lots of help in front of groups. Turns out to be one of the best investments I've made.

Think about where you want to go. And just begin.

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About the Author :

Tommy Yan helps business owners and entrepreneurs make more money through direct response marketing. He publishes Tommy's Tease weekly e-zine to inspire people to succeed in business and personal growth. Get your free subscription today at www.TommyYan.com.

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