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SMALL BUSINESS RESOURCES

Tracking Performance for Growth

A good tracking system is one of the most useful tools for helping individuals grow. Progress can be demonstrated only by comparing the past and the present. Tracking is the only method of evaluating both the quantity and the quality of performance for individuals, for a department or work group, or for the overall organization.

Every goal – organizational or personal – needs a deadline or target date. Without a deadline, there is no pressure to perform at top capacity. Deadlines provide a motivational “push.” Once people discover what they can do, that new level of productivity becomes a constant challenge for achievement.

Choose a tracking system that meets these criteria:

- Appropriate measurement. Make sure the tracking tool measures each important aspect of the activity. If your goal is to reduce the number of days between the receipt and shipping of orders, you won't be happy to discover that the time interval was cut from three days to one if you also learn that the error rate rose from one percent to eight percent. In this case, a tracking plan should include both speed and accuracy.
- Easy to use. The measurement tool should not add significantly to the workload. If every worker must spend an hour a day just filling in the report, you lose a good deal of valuable time that could have been used in more productive efforts.
- Easy to interpret. Tracking tools should present the facts visibly in a form that quickly reveals the pertinent facts. Charts, graphs, and summary reports with side-by-side comparisons to the last reporting period are easy to read and interpret. What you learn from the reports helps you decide what to do next. Make sure tracking information is used to advance the goals program. Providing Feedback on Performance

Because attitudes and behavior are so closely associated, it is often possible to change attitude by first changing behavior. When people try out new behavior patterns and discover that they are more satisfactory than established patterns, they gradually change their attitudes to match the new behaviors. Even when attitudes are favorable for success, employees sometimes do not know just what behaviors are appropriate expressions of those attitudes.

One of the best teaching tools is giving feedback on performance. Generally people respond to praise and recognition, but when they continue negative behavior, you might need to use a negative injunction. The purpose of a negative injunction is to stop negative behavior that creates an obstacle to reaching organizational goals or is counterproductive to getting a job done well.

For instance, if someone is consistently late to meetings or late turning in reports, a negative injunction lets that person know that promptness is important and you expect a change in behavior. When team members know immediately whether their behaviors are adequate or lacking in some way, they more quickly establish the desired habits and make desired attitude changes.

As you plan to provide feedback on performance to your employees, you will achieve the best possible results by following some simple guidelines:

- Make feedback specific and impersonal. Focus on the result of an action or decision rather than on the person. For example, you may tell a supervisor, “The production report you give me does not always provide the information I need. Let's go over the last one and agree on a form and schedule that give me the information I need to coordinate our work with that of other departments.” Focusing attention on the

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report instead of on the person not only produces a change in behavior, but also increases the likelihood that the new behavior will be what you desire.

- Give positive as well as negative feedback. Reserving feedback for correction of errors produces discouraged team members. Feedback should include praise for jobs well done, for innovative ideas pursued, and for extra effort expended to meet a deadline. Employees who are praised and recognized for good work are less likely to become defensive when correction is necessary.
- Regard feedback as coaching for growth. Feedback is a coaching opportunity in disguise. Your job as leader is to achieve organizational goals through people. While short-term goals may be reached with people at their present level of productivity, long-term goals can be achieved only when individual employees are encouraged to grow and increase their worth to the organization.
- Welcome feedback on your own performance—both positive and negative. Let the person you report to know that you want immediate, specific feedback. Avoid defensiveness when you receive suggestions for improvement. Learn to listen both to the person you report to and to your team members. You will hear ideas and information that you can use for your own personal growth.

LMI JOURNAL, VOLUME IV, NUMBER 7
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