

SMALL Business Times

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The power of feedback

Convince employees to be goal-oriented

Question:

I manage a five-person department and I'm having a hard time getting my employees to perform at the level that's been established according to the goals. Under what conditions do goals lead to successful performance? What can I do to help my employees be more goal-oriented and take more interest in achieving the goals?

Answer:

Effective goal setting involves two parts: (1) setting the goals and (2) offering feedback relative to the goals that have been set. In this article, I'll elaborate on each of these elements.

First, with regard to setting goals, research has demonstrated that the best goals are "SMART" goals. That is they are: specific, measurable, attainable, relevant, and time-driven. Here's a bit more about each part of the SMART acronym:

- **Specific** - Targeted goals work better than vague goals.
- **Measurable** - When goals can be measured, they are more likely to be pursued. Remember, "what gets measured, gets done."
- **Attainable** - When goals can be met, confidence and enthusiasm mount. Confronted with an unreach-

able goal, over time, most people will simply give up.

- **Relevant** - When people can see how the goal relates to them, they are more apt to pursue it.
- **Time-Driven** - Goals that have a defined time line are better than goals that are open-ended.

Additionally, research has demonstrated that goals that are set jointly work better than goals that the manager sets for the employee. Working cooperatively to set goals helps establish rapport and also tells the employee that goal setting is not something that is being done to them, but, rather, with them.

Once the goals have been set, it is important for you, as a manager, to make sure you are doing what you can to help the employee succeed. This means doing things like offering instructions, making sure the employee has the necessary resources, etc.

Further, let me emphasize that offering feedback is the most important thing a manager can do to encourage employees relative to their goals. Indeed, it has been said that feedback, not Wheaties, is the "Breakfast of Champions."

However, nobody ever said feedback is simple. Feedback involves communicating with people, and neither communication nor people are simple. Although feedback provides a necessary and useful learning experience, it may also provide an emotional experience for both people involved, most frequently the receiver of the feedback.

Generally, a person's reason for not wanting to give feedback comes down to some level of fear.

- Fear of hurting the person's feelings.

- Fear of the person's reactions.
- Fear of the person not listening.
- Fear of the person not liking or not agreeing with what you have to say.
- Fear of the person not caring about what you have to say.
- Fear of the person not liking you as a result of the feedback.
- Fear of not knowing how to provide feedback effectively.

While feedback may not be easy to give and receive it is necessary and extremely valuable. Feedback also:

- Helps people stay on target.
- Provides people with information about how others perceive their behavior.
- Gives people insight to the effects of their behavior on others.
- Allows people to choose behaviors that are effective based on a new awareness.
- Supports continued growth for the provider and the receiver.
- Maintains a positive work relationship between the provider and the receiver.

Here are some suggestions for giving effective feedback:

- Make sure your feedback is behavior-related. Stick to the facts.
- Consider your timing.
- Consider the needs of the individual.
- Focus on the behavior that can be changed.
- Offer feedback in a calm tone, especially if it is corrective feedback.
- Define the impact on the employee, you, the department, the organization, etc.
- Use "I" statements versus "you."

Conversely, when offering feedback, do not:

- Judge the other person.
- Deliver feedback indirectly.
- Send feedback through another person.
- Apologize for giving feedback.
- Overdo the amount of feedback given at one time.
- Give corrective feedback in public.
- Diminish the receiver's dignity or self-worth.
- Speak before you think.

Here's a bold statement: If you want your people to become more goal-oriented, then you need to become more of a feedback fanatic. It might be the most important thing you can do as a manager. Don't believe me? Well, here's what Tom Rath and Donald Clifton from Gallup have to say on the subject.

- According to a Gallup survey, the number one reason people leave their jobs is that they don't feel appreciated.
- According to a longitudinal study done by British scientist, Dr. George Fieldman, when employees work for years with bosses they don't like, their risk of coronary heart disease rose by 16 percent and their risk of stroke rose by 33 percent.

- According to a Gallup survey of 4,500 call center employees, negative employees can scare off every customer they speak with...for good!
- According to a Gallup survey, 65 percent of American workers report receiving no recognition in the workplace last year.
- According to a Gallup survey, more than 90 percent of people say they are more productive when they're around positive people.
- A recent Gallup survey asked parents, "Your child shows you the following grades: English-A, Social Studies-B, Biology-C, Algebra-F. Which grade warrants the most attention from you?" More than 75 percent of parents said Algebra.
- According to Nobel Prize-winning scientist Daniel Kahneman, we experience more than 20,000 individual "moments" in a waking day. As a manager, how do you help your employees experience their moments?
- Psychologist Dr. John Gottman has documented that the ratio of positive to negative interactions is critical. The "magic ratio" is 5:1. Less than 3:1 is too little. Greater than 13:1 is too much.

- A study undertaken at the Mayo Clinic examined patients over a 30-year period and found that those who experienced more positive emotions lived on average about 10 years longer.
- Positive emotions are not trivial luxuries. They are critical necessities for optimal functioning.

So, the suggestion here is to work collaboratively in pursuit of goals that matter to you, your employees, the work area, etc. Emphasize SMART goals and offer a strong ratio of positive to corrective feedback. Try to catch your people doing something right every day and, over time, you might just be surprised at the results that accrue.



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