

Solutions

Performance Strategies for Managers and Supervisors from the Division of Personnel

Fall 2009

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Quick Tip:

From the editors of *Solutions*

To create an atmosphere of motivation, follow these guidelines:

Lead by example.

Show your passion for the job – even when you are assigned complicated or unpleasant tasks.

Give Feedback.

Tell your employees how their jobs link to the important goals of the organization.

Present a Challenge.

Don't let employees settle for mediocre work. Gently drive them forward and empower them to perform with excellence.

Recognize and Praise Efforts.

Help others to shine by publicly calling out those who exceed your expectations.

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FEATURE ARTICLE

4 Behaviors of a Positive Employee

By Dr. Alan Zimmerman

If you're a manager, you can't afford to have negative, non-performing people on the payroll. 3M discovered that. When they laid off the bottom 10% or their poorest performers at one facility, their productivity went up 18%. When they laid off another 10% -- or the next poorest set of performers -- productivity went up another 4%. 3M learned that negative employees not only produced less, they cost more.

And you know the kinds of employees I'm talking about. Negative employees destroy morale and turn off customers by talking negatively. It's like the manager who asked his new secretary, "Why don't you ever answer the telephone?" She said, "Why should I? Nine times out of ten it's for you!"

Negative employees do just enough to get by. They don't have a lot of drive, and they don't take a lot of initiative. They may even say, "I've just got 7 more years, 3 months, and 2 days, and I'm out of here." In other words, they've got a lousy work attitude.

Likewise, if you're an employee, you can't afford to take a negative attitude to your job. According to Dr. Marion Stottlemire at the Kansas University Public Management Center:

"One of the greatest causes of stress in the modern world is unhappiness with our work or our work situation. YOU CANNOT AFFORD TO BE UNHAPPY ON THE JOB. It is killing you."

That being the case ... how does an employee with a good positive attitude behave? He/she will always exhibit four characteristics.

Positive employees know hard work is good for the soul.

Most people know it's good for the company. It's good for the customer. It's even good for the country. But only the winners know it's also good for the soul.

Best-selling author Rabbi Harold Kushner says it so well. He says: "Work hard, not solely because it will bring you rewards and promotions, but because it will give you a sense of being a competent person. Something corrosive happens to the souls of people who stop caring about the quality of their work...and begin to go through the motions."

Positive employees decide to enjoy their work ... no matter what.

Certainly, no job is perfect, and there's always room for improvement. There's always something to complain about. In spite of that, winners decide they're going to like their work. It's a decision they make, not a feeling they have ... if everything is going well.

Winners are like Robert. When I learned that he had been passed over for a promotion, and that a subordinate had gotten the job, I asked him how he was dealing with it. He replied, "Well for a while I was quite bitter. Then I realized that I was making myself miserable. I decided that I had always liked this job, and I was just going to keep doing it and make the most of it."

Your job may not be fun. It may not even seem meaningful all the time. But if you're a winner, you're going to enjoy your work ... no matter what.

continued on the next page.

4 Behaviors of A Positive Employee

Continued from page 1

I know it sounds a little harsh, but I've often told my audiences, if you think your job stinks, if you think employment is bad, try unemployment for a little while.

Positive employees see the good in every situation.

Like anyone else they can see what's wrong with a situation, but they don't get stuck on that point. Winners keep themselves motivated by seeing the good in any situation and focus on how they could make it better.

By contrast, the negative people focus on a minor annoyance and let it ruin everything. It's like the person who was chosen to attend my two-day program, "The Journey To The Extraordinary." Even though the trip and program were paid by his company; the hotel was very nice, and the training was excellent, his only comment about the entire event was

the fact that the chairs in the training room were uncomfortable. I'm sure they were. But his focus on the uncomfortable chairs kept him from experiencing the transformation everyone else was experiencing.

Of course, positive employees ... who see the good in every situation ... may annoy the losers in the company. The losers may see these positive people as Pollyannaish or blind, and they may be disgusted with those people who aren't wallowing in the negativity with them. So be it.

Positive employees ask how they can do more than is expected.

They're never satisfied with merely getting by or doing the bare minimum. They know ... if they were to do that ... that they couldn't possibly feel good about themselves.

So positive employees find out what's expected and do their best to exceed those expectations. Whether it's dazzling a customer with better service than she's ever experienced before ... or surprising a coworker by offering extra help ... positive employees focus on how they can do more, not less.

Concluding Thought

If you're trying to assemble a top-notch team, look for these four characteristics. And if you want to move ahead in your career, display these four behaviors. They always work!

About the Author:

Best-selling author and Hall of Fame professional speaker, Dr. Alan Zimmerman has taught more than one million people in 48 states and 22 countries how to get and stay motivated all the time ... no matter what. In his award-winning program, "THE JOURNEY TO THE EXTRAORDINARY," Dr. Zimmerman outlines the 12 steps you must take to achieve peak performance. For a FREE GUIDED TOUR of the 12 steps go to: <http://www.JourneyToTheExtraordinary.com/>

Decisiveness

How diplomatic are you?

Circle the answer that describes the best response to each situation:

1. You make a suggestion to improve a process. A manager disapproves and says so. You believe in your idea and want to pursue it.

You should:

- A. Speak on your own with someone higher up.
- B. Tell the manager that you understand the concern but still want to pursue the idea.
- C. Let the matter drop to avoid making an enemy.

2. You discover that a vendor submitted duplicate invoices and was paid for both. The person who made the error was just promoted.

You should:

- A. Call the vendor and have the duplicate funds returned.
- B. Contact your former co-worker to ask for information.
- C. Complain to your boss about the co-worker's incompetence.

3. You've been asked to represent your boss at an industry event. You know that one of your colleagues feels slighted.

You should:

- A. Thank your boss and attend the event.
- B. Tell your colleague you're going, but express regret that your colleague can't go too.
- C. Tell your boss that your colleague really wants to go. Offer to serve as the back-up person instead.

Answers:

- 1. B. Although the manager may not agree with your plan, honesty is your best bet.
- 2. B. Don't upset the vendor, or besmirch someone's reputation, without having all the facts.
- 3. A. Although it's important to consider others' feelings, don't create problems where none exist.

Communication Briefings
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"You pay a price for getting stronger. You pay a price for getting faster. You pay a price for jumping higher. (But also) you pay a price for staying just the same."

- H. Jackson Brown

Verbal Communication

Are you getting all you can out of questions?

Questions allow managers to elicit important information from their employees. But they can accomplish that and so much more.

Are you using questions for all they're worth?

Beyond Information Gathering

Here are some other things you can do with questions:

Let others know you're open to feedback. "How did you feel about that meeting last week. Did I let it go on too long?"

Make connections by referring to a shared experience. "Wasn't that a great week we had last week? Did you ever see so much progress on a project?"

Encourage conversation by leaving the possible answers wide open. "So what was the best idea you ever heard of for handling this issue?"

Open the other person's mind to new possibilities. "Did it occur to you that Procedure X was created in response to conditions that no longer exist?"

Inspire change. "Do you want to have a lot more fun with your product inspection job? Would you like to hear an idea or two about how you could do that?"

Source: "Asking Questions for a Change," by Joanna Young

"The aim of a great leader is not to get people to think more highly of the leader. It's to get people to think more highly of themselves."

- Bob Moawad

Creative Thinking

Reclaim your team's lost time

Your department has been asked to tackle an important project. The problem: Your staffers tell you they're pushed to their limits and they simply don't have time for a task of that magnitude.

Solutions: You could admit that everyone is stretched too thin and hire more staff (yeah, right!). You could exhort and cajole everyone to simply work harder. Or you can help your staffers find more time within their existing schedules. Here's how:

Meetings. Every organization in the world can free up tremendous amounts of time by reducing the number and scope of meetings held. First, make sure all meetings have a clear and useful purpose. Insist that every meeting has an agenda and that meeting leaders stick to it. And ask meeting planners to carefully consider the list of attendees and invite only those who really need to be there.

Environment. Do you often find yourself working off-site or coming in on weekends because your workplace is full of distractions? If so, you're probably not the only one. Distracted workers are inefficient workers and you and your co-workers are losing significant amounts of time. Your challenge is to identify and eliminate as many distractions as possible.

Routine work. Focus for a moment on all the routine tasks you perform without really thinking. Is it all really necessary? You probably have at least one or two items on your routine work list that wouldn't be missed if you stopped doing them. Likely candidates could be some regular reports or duplicated record keeping.

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Workforce Management

Properly conducted performance reviews pay huge dividends

Employee reviews can be one of the most powerful management tools in your arsenal—or a morale-sucking waste of everybody's time. It all depends on how the manager conducts the process. Remember these crucial points:

Don't run an assembly line. A lot of managers hate the review process, so they schedule them all in the same week or even on the same day in order to get them over with. When possible, schedule only one review per day, so you have time to answer questions, preview the future, set goals, and so on.

Preview rather than review. Don't get caught up thinking that reviews have to focus entirely on the past—rehashing every right and wrong move the employee made over the last year. Spend the majority of the review time on the future: What do you expect in the coming year? How can we take what happened in the past and apply it the future. What are your goals, and what are the employee's?

Don't compare employees to your "star" workers in order to motivate them. Employees don't like being compared unfavorably to their peers. Instead, focus on the individual's strengths and weaknesses.

Don't use yourself as an example, either. As soon as you say, "When I was in your position..." you lose the employee, for the same reasons listed above.

Keep personality out of it unless it relates to work performance. It's unreasonable to expect people to change their personalities. This would indicate that the employee and the company are not a good match. However, if a shift in behavior would positively affect a person's performance or relationship with coworkers, the change should be suggested.

Leading for Results
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Chicago, IL 60601
Telephone: 800-878-5331
www.managementresources.com

Fired for repeated work violations or complaints about discrimination?

An employee who was terminated after multiple work violations filed suit against his former employer, claiming that he had been subjected to a racially hostile work environment and that the company had retaliated against him for reporting the situation. Did the 8th Circuit Court of Appeals (which covers AR, IA, MN, MO, NE, ND, and SD) agree with him?

What Happened?

Herman Jackson was disciplined 20 times during the 17 months that he worked for Flint Ink North American Corporation, primarily for attendance-related issues and for his misuse of the time clock. Jackson, who is black, complained to his supervisor that the plant manager had referred to him using racially derogatory remarks in two separate instances. His co-workers had also made racially offensive remarks on four different occasions, Jackson claimed.

In addition, Jackson felt threatened by drawings of a burning cross that appeared with the letters “KKK” in a shower area and on a wall near a back door elsewhere in the plant. In the latter location, graffiti stating, “H.J. slept here,” also appeared nearby, an apparent reference to Jackson having been disciplined twice for sleeping on the job.

Flint Ink fired Jackson three times for poor performance but reinstated him the first two times after negotiations with Jackson’s union. After the final termination, Jackson filed suit against the company.

What the court said

The 8th Circuit court affirmed the district court’s decision that Jackson’s termination was justified. The appeals court said the graffiti and racial slurs where “insufficient to make out a Title VII claim,” and that in firing Jackson, Flint Ink did not retaliate against him. In 17 months, Jackson was exposed “to six isolated instances of racially derogatory language,” the court said, noting that some of the comments were not made directly to Jackson, and two were made

during heated confrontations. In addition, the court said it couldn’t conclude that the burning cross graffiti was a threat specifically targeting Jackson. Finally, the court noted that there was “abundant evidence” showing that “. . . Jackson consistently failed to meet the legitimate expectations of Flint Ink in the performance of his job.”

Jackson v. Flint Ink North American Corporation, also known as Flint Ink Corporation, U.S. Court of Appeals for the 8th Circuit, No. 03-2189 (6/7/2004)

The Law

Civil Rights Act of 1964

Under Title VII of the federal Civil Rights Act of 1964, it is unlawful for an employer of 15 or more employees to refuse to hire, discharge, or take action affecting an employee’s compensation, terms, conditions, or privileges of employment because of the employee’s race. This means that an employer must not consider race in its hiring, promoting, compensating, training, disciplining, or terminating a job applicant or employee.

An employer may also violate the law if it is aware or should be aware that its supervisors or employees are engaging in discriminatory conduct such as racial slurs, graffiti, or ethnic jokes that creates an objectively hostile or abusive working environment. An occasional improper comment or joke generally does not create a hostile or abusive working environment.

Instead, such an environment is created only when the discrimination is so severe that it alters the conditions of the victim’s employment and creates an abusive working environment. This means that if the discriminatory conduct is severe, the harasser need not act multiple times in order to be violating the law. Conversely, if the discriminatory conduct is less severe, it must occur more frequently to constitute a violation of the law.

What to Remember

- **Promote diversity.** Train managers to understand the benefits of employing a diverse workforce. Make it clear that racial slurs and racial harassment are not acceptable. Explain the potential legal liability that your company faces and the damage such behavior can have on employee morale.
- **Promptly address racial incidents.** There was no evidence in this case that managers at Flint Ink were aware of the burning cross graffiti or the co-workers statements. The court noted that when they had become aware of other graffiti at the plant, they had it removed promptly.
- **Be consistent in discipline.** The appeals court dismissed Jackson’s allegation that his discipline problems were related to his supervisor’s racism, pointing out that other employees had been fired for similar violations—regardless of their race.

Best Practices in HR
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Solutions

“The problems we face cannot be solved at the same level of thinking we were at when we created them.”

Albert Einstein

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Guy Krause, Manager

After a layoff, employees need to hear from you loud and clear

When it comes to saying the right thing to survivors of downsizing, what we've often got is a failure to communicate.

Why? After all, HR and every other decision maker knows that you have to talk to those who remain after a layoff – that otherwise they'll stew in their own juices of resentment and fear, and the whole organization will suffer.

Trouble is, it's natural to feel uneasy when approaching somebody who's seen friends and associates let go and think it's your fault. Uneasy enough to even give up the attempt sometimes.

Maybe that's one reason why so many organizations are sometimes slow to take the necessary steps – starting with better communication – to restore morale in this tough climate.

A recent *Business 21* survey of 80 HR professionals reveals that 42% of employers know they need to boost morale, but haven't done anything.

Only 19% said they had attacked the problem with success, while the remainder said that they either didn't need to do anything, or had tried and failed.

Structuring Your Plan

No single communication plan is right for every organization. But here are some key ideas you can use to structure a morale-boosting plan for talking to employees when there's been a layoff – or even when there hasn't, but people are worried:

Decide on a unified core message in collaboration with your top managers. Multiple messages coming from multiple mouths can actually damage morale further by adding an element of incredulity – employees will first wonder who they can believe and then decide, nobody.

Add on customized messages as necessary. You may, for instance, want to make a special effort to reassure your top performers that the organization is committed to their being part of the long-term solution.

Use a range of communications channels. Messages sink in better – and are more reassuring – when the versions of the core message are delivered in a variety of ways.

For example, you may want to hold monthly all-agency meetings, coupled with bi-weekly division meetings and/or all-staff emails and one-on-one meetings.

Manage the grapevine. You may have to speak directly to malcontents. Left unaddressed, their complaints can undermine all of your efforts to get the real story out.

And you'll definitely want to encourage optimists to continue projecting a positive attitude.

Allow employees to vent and discuss concerns. Morale-building communication works both ways. Don't confuse those who have legitimate concerns about the future with the others described above. If you prevent the former from expressing their worries, they could turn into the latter.

Focus employees on what they can control. It's true that your organization and its people can't do a lot about big economic trends.

But there is much your employees *can* do about your specific situation, such as stepping up teamwork and other morale building activities.

You want your message to help restore survivors' feeling of control over their own lives, which layoffs or other bad news may have damaged.

Adapted in part from an audio conference with Marla Bradley of Bradley/Lambert Inc.
www.bradleylambert.com

EXTRA:

Information employees need

While rebuilding morale after a layoff or other discouraging business developments is important, employees do need more than just encouragement. They know that their jobs and the way they do them will likely be affected, and they need to know specifics sooner rather than later. Here are three key points your communication strategy should include:

What is expected of each employee in the reshaped organization?

What was good enough in the past may not be good enough today. Employees may have to shoulder additional burdens, approach their work with new priorities or think differently about competition or customers. If so, they need an idea of what resources they'll have available to them.

Will job responsibilities change, and how?

Job consolidation is a frequent consequence of downsizing. If employees must take on work previously done by someone who will not be replaced, they may need specific advice about how that work fits into what they already do. In a pinch, what can they leave undone – or delay – and what must absolutely be done on time? Which duties will play the biggest role in their next performance review?

Are budgets reduced and by how much?

You don't want to subject people to a "death by a thousand cuts" as they gradually learn over a period of months which resources are no longer available or are in short supply. Much better to tell everyone right away how much money there is, and what that will mean for each area of the organization.

Get ready before the leadership crisis hits

The company had a problem. As Eric Herzog, president of Quest Consulting & Training Corporation (Pacific Palisades, Calif.) recalls, “They said, ‘We really need to put some leadership development processes and programs in place, particularly starting with our supervisory level.’ We said, ‘Okay, we can do that for you, but let me just guess as to why: You’re going to lose maybe up to half of your management talent in the next five years?’ And they said, ‘You’re close, but we anticipate it’s going to happen in the next three years.’”

A leadership shortage can catch your organization by surprise. It doesn’t have to cripple you, but swift action is essential. In a recent interview, Herzog, a graduate of the MIT Sloan School of Management and a consultant with more than 20 years of experience in leadership development with companies like Costco, Red Bull, Boeing, and others, shared some secrets of success with *Leading for Results*.

Assess Your Vulnerabilities

To head off a potential crisis in leadership at your organization, Herzog recommends a thorough assessment of critical positions: jobs and functions that your organization depends on for continued success. Define those critical positions first, then look at the incumbents. How long have they been with your organization? How old are they? What are their career plans? “If you can get some specifics as to what their plans are for retirement, all the better,” Herzog tells LFR.

If you think you can always hire a quick replacement, think again. “You can say, ‘Oh sure, I can go out and hire a leader-manager,’ but are they going to know your business? How are you going to bring them up-to-speed?” Herzog notes that in today’s global business environment, desirable candidates can usually get a good job anywhere in the world if they’re

willing to relocate. Your best bet is to start looking for talent internally, so you can look at people’s track records, and leadership capabilities.

How to Spot a Leadership Candidate

So what should you look for when you need to identify potential leaders for the future? And, just as significantly, what should you avoid? Herzog offers some basic questions to ask when evaluating possible candidates for leadership development:

Have they been able to successfully lead and manage a process?

They should have a demonstrated ability to achieve results, but also show skill in dealing with people constructively—direct reports but also peers, clients, and superiors.

How well do they manage change?

This important skill can be easy to overlook, Herzog says. “When you’re looking for potential, you want to look for people who have the ability to manage the organization as it will be in the future. Sometimes people who do a good job today are not the ones who can bring about and manage change for the future.

Are they open to input and suggestions?

As an employee moves up the ranks, listening and responding to others is the single most important skill in Herzog’s view. “You need to avoid people who don’t operate that way,” Herzog says. “That’s the kiss of death, when people think they have all the answers, and they’re not seeking input constantly.”

Do they look and act just like you?

This is one to avoid. “It’s just human nature, but people tend to pick people like themselves,” Herzog notes. “And that gets organizations into trouble.” One of Herzog’s clients fights this tendency with a volunteer system: Instead of nominating selected employees for leadership development, the company clearly tells all of its hourly employees to express interest if they want to be considered for promotion. “It doesn’t mean that you’re automatically granted that opportunity, but you will put yourself in a pool of people who believe they have the potential, and then they’re considered seriously.”

Get going—now!

You can’t afford to waste any time. With a good development process in place, Herzog tells LFR, talented people can be brought up-to-speed for senior positions in six or seven years. To develop managers and supervisors, the process may take only three or four years. “It doesn’t have to take forever,” Herzog notes. The important thing is to get started today.

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Chicago, IL 60601
Telephone: 800-878-5331
Email: RMR@ragan.com
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“The pace of events is moving so fast that unless we can find some way to keep our sights on tomorrow, we cannot expect to be in touch with today.”

- Dean Rusk