

BY: SAL SILVESTER AND VITAL LEARNING

## ACHIEVING PEAK PERFORMANCE

Several years ago I was asked to do some consulting for a Fortune 500 company. At issue was finding out why the organization was so fragmented in its approach to business, even though the organizational goals had been well articulated and included in its vision, mission, and strategy. After some key employee interviews and focus groups in each of the main divisions, it didn't take me long to see the problem. It was glaring. They could all talk about the goals, but there was no well-defined process that kept everyone on the same page to implement them. With employees wondering what their role was in moving the business forward, they missed deadlines, and they had an organization which was out of focus.

There is a quote by Dick Grote: "Performance appraisal systems are like seat belts—most people believe they are necessary, but don't like to use them." Performance management done right enables work team members to truly understand the organizational performance requirements and their role in driving toward the organizational business goals.

### Some Perspective

In *The Role of Goal Setting and Performance Feedback in Achieving Peak Performance* by Roger Wenschlag, he says "Effective performance management is a high-payoff activity. It directly contributes to peak performance by team members, and produces the desired organizational results. This is because, as we know from Frederick Herzberg's landmark research, individuals are strongly motivated at work by five key factors inherent to the job itself: challenge, growth, a sense of contribution, recognition, and responsibility. Leaders, who consistently practice good performance management through effective goal setting and performance feedback, have immense power to establish and sustain a work environment where these motivators are present. And, as we all know, it's pretty hard to beat a team of highly motivated people."

Wenschlag states a pretty powerful case. Many organizations are in a place that finds them at risk because they aren't using "seat belts." Here's a test. If you find yourself identifying with even one of these performance feedback shortfalls, then it is likely you will experience something short of your goals:

1. The organization has no workable performance management policy and/or process.
2. There is no leader accountability for effective performance management.
3. Leaders don't make adequate time to address critical performance management issues one-on-one with their people.
4. Leaders are reluctant to delegate responsibility for work that they think they can do better and faster themselves.
5. Leaders fear confronting others about performance issues because of potential defensiveness.
6. Leaders don't have the skills to conduct effective goal setting and/or performance feedback

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So let's get SMART.

## A Solution

Essentially, performance goals/objectives are key drivers of performance. They provide fundamental direction and motivation. And, when done well, they are written in SMART terms: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-oriented, and Time-framed. This approach addresses the who, what, when, where, how much, and how well. A well-designed performance process using SMART goal setting leaves little room for confusion about how the employee fits in, what has to be done, and how it will be measured.

Given the above, your managers, supervisors, and team leaders are critical in developing performance goals and objectives with team members. A hallmark of good leaders is that they approach this process collaboratively, and then provide ongoing feedback in support and attainment of SMART-based standards. If the organization's leaders are all on the same page with the same process, everyone is driving toward individual goals which in turn come together and work toward the organizational goals and objectives. Everyone is in the driver's seat, secure with their seat belts heading to the required destination.

As Wenschlag writes, "When done well, performance management contributes to three key outcomes:

- Satisfied customers who experience the value they desire from the products and services they buy.
- Committed and motivated employees who fully participate in planning and doing the work of the organization.
- Peak organizational performance through focused and aligned efforts.

Using a SMART approach to developing Performance Goals and Standards will help your managers and team leaders to:

- Build team member commitment through collaborative planning of performance goals.
- Align team members with key business goals and priorities through focused goals and standards.
- Assure the clarity and measurability of performance goals/objectives through SMART-based standards.
- Achieve high quality, ongoing time performance through team members' ability to judge and self-correct their work.
- Observe, coach, support, and evaluate performance through clear, measurable performance standards.

## About 5.12 Solutions

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