

Tell Employees What They Need to Hear

By Allan Adams

All employers, whether they are businesses, government, or non-profit organizations, have employees that they depend on to make the enterprise function. Making sure employees understand what their responsibilities are and whether they are meeting expectations are responsibilities of managers. Performance evaluations should, on occasion, be written, but they should not be limited to only once per year or other fixed periods of time. Feedback on performance should be a continuous process, and most of all, employees need to be given honest, accurate input on how well they are meeting expectations. Otherwise, problems will develop.

Many small businesses have a limited number of employees that work in close proximity to one another. In such an environment, where business relationships can blend with personal relationships, it can become difficult to offer critical feedback on employee performance. It may be especially difficult when a group of employees has been together for an extended period of time. With new employees, it may be easier to point out shortcomings in punctuality, customer service, attention to detail, etc. When an employee has been a solid performer for an extended period of time and the relationship between boss and subordinate has become very casual, a

downturn in performance can create a dilemma. It may feel awkward to question or criticize someone who has never needed correction before. There may be concerns that the employee will be offended or angered. Managers may also worry that they could damage the long term relationship over something that is a one time or isolated circumstance, especially if the employee is experiencing personal difficulties.

However, the desire to avoid conflict or offense can actually make matters worse. Whether an employee is well established or brand new, it is a disservice to him/her, the business, other employees, and customers to not make sure everyone is doing their assigned duties and carrying their share of the load. Not only can poor performance jeopardize the business, place unfair burdens on other employees, and/or negatively impact individual customers, if unaddressed, it can allow the offending employee to start down a path towards failure and ultimately dismissal. It is better to address problems while they are small and more easily corrected than to wait until they become more significant and emotionally or physically difficult to deal with. If an employee is highly valued, regardless of tenure, then problems should be addressed immediately. While the employee may indeed be offended or embarrassed, better to give them the best opportunity and most time to improve, rather than wait until the problem grows to the point it is even more uncomfortable to deal with. If the relationship with the employee is strained

for a period of time after this, it should get better as the employee's performance improves. If performance does not improve, additional correction and guidance must be given.

The rule of thumb should be to "tell employees what they need to hear...sooner rather than later."



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