

# Successful managers praise a job well done

People function through systems—systems they learned in previous jobs and those which have evolved while working in their current position. Often those systems become subliminal, and work patterns are carried out in an almost automatic and unconscious manner.

This pattern is pervasive and is employed by all levels of the work force. One example of a familiar system is the way many managers direct their staffs. Many manage by performing evaluations which focus on end results and past activities.

Progress is reviewed at the end of a stated period such as each month or quarter or even less often.

During a typical management evaluation session, management might say something such as "Let's take a look at how things are going and determine what can be done to improve." Some would say that this procedure provides guidance and feedback.

Unfortunately, the majority of those who view it that way are usually in management; however, those being "guided" generally see the meeting as nothing more than a "brow-beating" session.

Perhaps the reason for this divergence of opinion is due to a misunderstanding on the part of management. Managers may assume that their staffs always perceive things in the same manner as they do and that such management sessions are very productive.

In drawing such a conclusion, management is taking a great deal for granted. In addition, permitting large periods of time to elapse between sessions and then reflecting on what went wrong to help correct things only adds to the problem. Such tactics, while typical, result in a demoralized staff that feels unappreciated and unmotivated.

According to Vince Zirpoli, president of Mega Marketing Inc., a local marketing and management consulting firm, this management method is analogous to "looking through

the rear-view mirror of your car as you are driving." Zirpoli says that the solution to this dilemma is to foster empowerment with the employees by using a six-step process.

The steps in his performance management system are:

(1) the facilitation vehicle, (2) objectives, (3) feedback of objective-focused activities, (4) measurement, (5) positive reinforcement, and (6) coaching.

These steps must be augmented daily or weekly or at least, routinely in meetings between management and employees. In doing so, the activity brings to a conscious level what is happening and how things are going, and getting together creates a way to provide employees with regular and ongoing feedback. Conference calls can be an effective means of accomplishing such close contact. While some employees may argue that this is micro-managing, subscribers to such a system point out that this type of activity creates known expectations early on and allows for course corrections to be made before much harm is caused.

Even more important is that when management recognizes achievement at or near the time it occurs, it can be an extremely effective motivational force. A convincing argument can be made for the proposition that most people need a structured performance management system to assist them in prioritizing and modifying unacceptable patterns of behavior.

Although many leadership roles manage by reacting to problems as they arise, they are better off managing more closely in the first place. Using his driving example again to make the point, Zirpoli says "you don't drive a car with your hands off the wheel and grab it only when you need to."

Another important aspect of performance management is that it is intended to catch people doing things right rather than focusing on what they did wrong. It's easy to see why employees will readily accept ongoing

hands-on management when it provides regular positive monitoring and feedback on well done accomplishments along with coaching on needed corrections. If such actions come early and well before unacceptable habit patterns are established, perhaps unpleasant blowups and losses which result in workplace schisms can be alleviated.

Everyone wins in this form of dialogue. The employee, feels appreciated and empowered, wants to be creative and will continue to be stimulated. Thus his or her employer benefits greatly. The alternative method of scolding those who have made key decisions without regular input usually stunts future creativity and generally causes employees to withdraw.

For managers who think paying large salaries should be enough reason for employees to stay stimulated, remember most people don't think they are moving forward in their professional life. Money without direction, coaching and praise is not the answer, Zirpoli says. "People don't usually work just to see their employer succeed but rather do so to see that their own goals are being carried out," he said.

So, if management is ingenious enough to have an active dialogue with its staff, providing constant coaching and input, thereby building on their employees' ideas and enthusiasm, there can be a merger of goals and all parties can enjoy the benefit of this successful partnership.

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