



Evaluating Performance and Providing Feedback

By: Kelly Graves "The Corporate Therapist™"

1. Clarify the results and expectations of the job. These should be outputs, not inputs.
 - a. Example: target of 5% or less missed orders. Question during interview process. What steps have you taken to lower the missed or dropped orders? What steps might you and I come up with to help in this area?
2. Gain agreement with the performer. The goals should be seen as realistic and attainable, and not an order handed down from above.
 - a. Example: Last year or quarter our dropped orders were at 12%. What do you think is a reasonable figure to shoot for over the next quarter? What might you do different this quarter versus last quarter to help you achieve that goal? How may I help? OR. What help or support from me might you need to reach your target?
3. Agree to the goals in writing. This is to establish a baseline in case individuals or conditions change, and to prevent "memory loss" if actual performance isn't what it should be.
4. Agree on an intelligent measuring scale.
 - a. Example: Last quarter our dropped orders were 12% and we have agreed that a target of 6% is realistic. We have laid out a plan to help us achieve this. So, our measuring scale will be an inventory count in 3 months to determine if our improvement methods were effective.
 - b. Expectations grading: Employees require development in order to perform on the job at acceptable levels. Often it is advisable to implement a scale such as:
 - i. Meets expectations. Employee is performing as expected. Example: Our target was a reduction from 12% to 6% and we hit our 6% mark.
 - ii. Exceeds expectations: Employee is performing above and beyond plans, and results exceed original goals. Example: We reduced our dropped orders to 3.5% over the last quarter.
5. Provide feedback at least monthly (or more often) so that there are no surprises and deficiencies can be quickly addressed. This also takes the focus of evaluation off the annual monetary (bonus or no bonus) issues and places it on daily performance issues.
6. Document your comments and findings so that there is a record.

Coaching and Counseling as a Systemic Process

All managers need to engage in coaching on a daily basis and counseling on an “as needed” basis. Let me define these two terms.

COACHING: Coaching is both proactive and reactive support and mentoring provided to employees to improve their performance and help them when having difficulties. It is mainly focused on maintaining existing, strong performance and improving it still further.

COUNSELING: Counseling is the reactive, structured approach implemented when an employee is performing below expectations, due to either a skill deficiency or an attitude deficiency. It is mainly focused on restoring performance to a minimally acceptable level or, failing that, removing the employee from that job.

Managers need to be adept at both skills, but also understand that they are discrete and separate endeavors.

All employees should be coached on an ongoing basis. It’s a form of mentoring or advising that enables ongoing dialogue between the manager and the subordinate so that feedback on performance doesn’t occur only when there is a problem. Moreover, it allows for excellent work to be recognized, supported, exploited, and conveyed to others.

Consequently, good managers spend 10 times more of their efforts on and energy on coaching than on counseling. Poor managers confuse the two, don’t understand the difference, and usually respond only to problems, meaning that a significant amount of their time is spent on correcting weaknesses rather than on supporting strengths.

The Coaching Process

The strategy for effective coaching should include the following steps:

- Once a year the manager creates a developmental plan with each employee that includes areas for improvement. Note that these are not remedial areas that must be improved or else, but areas that represent continued growth and gratification for the employee, and meaningful additional contributions to the organization.
- The manager and employee agree on the specific **ACTIONS AND BEHAVIORS** required of both of them to meet their goals.
- The manager and employee meet formally once a quarter to review progress and modify the plan as needed.
- The manager builds in to his or her weekly calendar and priorities time for each person in the coaching relationship. That time may be ten minutes to review a given project, or an hour spent on a new technique being implemented. These should not be formal meetings, and they should always be one-on-one.

- The manager also makes it a practice to spontaneously spend a few minutes with employees as conditions merit, for example, praising someone on a nice job, inquiring if help is needed with a difficult customer or student, or offering a perspective for an unprecedented request.

The most important attributes of a coach are:

- The dialogue is constant and ongoing, not oriented around a periodic review.
- The feedback is timely, offered at the point where an issue, performance, or problem arises.
- The manager advises but the employee performs.
- Coaching is overwhelmingly positively oriented or neutral. However, the manager does not provide negative feedback when there is clear evidence that the employee's judgment was wrong, actions were inappropriate, or performance was below standards.
- The manager is approachable, and the employee feels comfortable initiating conversations and requesting feedback.
- Employees become coaches themselves. One of the most significant signs of success in coaching is that employees begin coaching others, both subordinates and peers. Thus creating a learning organization.

The Process of Counseling

Counseling is a progressive sequence of interactions with the employee that results in either restored, acceptable performance, or the performer leaving the job. Counseling is essential to improving organizational performance, yet few managers ever engage in it systematically, and most don't effectively engage in it at all.

Here are the steps in the systematic counseling process:

1. Determine if the poor performance is caused by a lack of skills or a poor attitude. (e.g., skills deficit or attitude deficit)
2. Focus on the *behavioral* and the evidence.
3. Obtain agreement on the standard and the actual performance.
4. Discuss impact on the performance on others or the organization.
5. Discuss manager's available alternatives and the consequences for the employee.
6. Establish action plan for improvement with dates and accountability.
7. Review and monitor progress.
8. Make decision.