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“The Performance Dialogue” Three simple steps to managing performance effectively

“I have a performance appraisal meeting with my manager today. It’s one of those days in the year when I would rather stay at home” Adrian anxiously verbalises to his colleagues. “It can’t be all that bad, you will still get your 13th cheque even if you have not achieved your objectives” sneers Jenny. “Just the whole experience is a nightmare, it feels that I am being judged and my work scrutinised” adds Adrian.

As 2016 gets underway and the financial year-end drawing closer, the big question for most company executives is: How well has the organisation performed, and how do those results weigh up against its planned objectives?

The performance appraisal is absolutely vital in this time, both for setting and measuring individual, team and organisational objectives and in some cases the allocation of bonuses and salary increases.

Many organisations have an appraisal discussion once or twice a year, often resulting in one of two scenarios: either employees receive incentives regardless of whether or not objectives were achieved, or only a few people receive incentives based on their performance.

Often noticed in organisations, “What you recognise you see more off”.

If you are recognising underperformers you will most probably see more underperformers as there will be no incentives to perform. The same for high performers, if recognised in the same way as underperformers there is no motivation or incentive to be a high performer.

International best practice has shown that having an ongoing performance dialogue amounts to more than just the appraisal; it is an ongoing discussion between the manager and individuals, which covers performance planning, setting clear objectives, as well as managing and supporting the individual, through to the appraisal. A mid-year appraisal is often linked to training and development, ensuring the individual receives all the support needed to achieve the set objectives. Following these methods ensures smooth sailing during the appraisal process and achievement of the individual, team and organisational objectives.

Step 1 – Planning for performance:

This clarifies and links individual objectives to team and organisational objectives, as well as agreeing and planning for development. Some of the most common traps and mistakes include setting vague objectives, setting objectives that are too difficult or too easy to achieve, or setting too many objectives. Best practice in planning for performance is involving employees in the planning and

setting of their objectives; when there is mutual agreement reached on expectations, both management and employees are more committed to achieving the objectives.

Step 2 – Managing and coaching for performance:

This includes coaching, informal follow-ups, review discussions, communication of major changes and mutual feedback on results.

In the Manager's role as coach and leader, the manager should be:

- Documenting performance throughout the period
- Providing ongoing follow-up and discussion on achievements, challenges and expectations
- Giving timely motivational or corrective feedback
- Applying the principles of effective coaching for performance

Try changing vague negative statements into positive affirmations; be more factual, descriptive and effective. For example, instead of "You don't show initiative", you could say "You have so much knowledge and so many ideas, and I would like for you to share them with us at meetings. I value your contribution to this department".

Similarly, instead of "You never meet deadlines", say "I've noticed that a few of your deadlines were missed. Would you like to talk about it? How can I support you to ensure your deadlines are met in future?"

Step 3 – The appraisal

It is here that the appraisal of the individual's contribution towards the objectives are done.

It's important to note that the appraisal should not:

- Be seen as a judgement on the individual
- Be filled with any surprises
- Become a platform to air any biases

A few of the many reasons why it is important to evaluate performance include:

- Aligning individual efforts to organisational goals
- Showing recognition to employees for their contributions
- Better training and development of employee
- Ensuring better planning for succession
- Achieving fairness in compensation programmes
- Encouraging accountability and responsibility for outcomes

Following these simple steps will create a culture of motivation and achievement for both the individual as well as the organisation.

In the words of Henry W. Longfellow: "The talent of success is nothing more than doing what you can do, well".