

# IMPROVING PERFORMANCE

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Achieving excellence through performance is accomplished in two major ways. The first way is taking a proactive stance by unearthing or preventing counter-productive methods. For example, you might implement diversity and sexual harassment training programs **before** they become a problem within the organization.

The second way is to correct performance problems that arise within the organization. This is accomplished by first, identifying the **root cause** and secondly, implementing a plan of action to correct the problem.

There are four major causes of performance problems:

- Knowledge or Skills - The employee does not know how to perform the process correctly - lack of skills, knowledge, or abilities.
- Process - The problem is not employee related, but is caused by working conditions, bad processes, etc, etc.
- Resources - Lack of resources or technology.
- Motivation or Culture - The employee knows how to perform, but does so incorrectly.

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## Lacks the Skills, Knowledge, or Abilities to Perform

This problem generally arises when there is a new hire, new or revised process, change in standards, new equipment, new policies, promotion or transfer, or a new product. In this case, there is only one solution...training. The training may be formal classes, on-the-job, self-study, coaching, etc. To determine if training is needed, we only need to ask one question, "Does the employee know how to perform the task?" If the answer is yes, then training is not needed. If the answer is no, then training is required. This is where good coaching skills come in.

Many people tend to use the terms coaching, mentoring, and training interchangeably. However, there are differences. Mentoring is often thought of as the transfer of wisdom from a wise and trusted teacher. He/she helps to guide a person's career, normally in the upper reaches of the organization. However, this perception is starting to change as organizations are now implementing mentoring at all levels of a company structure.

Training is about **teaching** a particular skill or knowledge.

Coaching, on the other hand, is about **increasing** an individual's knowledge and thought processes with a particular task or process. It creates a supportive environment that develops critical thinking skills, ideas, and behaviors about a subject. Although it is closely tied to training, it is more personal and intimate in nature.

Mentoring is more career developing in nature, while training and coaching are more task or process orientated. Also, mentoring relies on the mentor's specific knowledge and wisdom, while coaching and training relies on facilitation and developmental skills. Although there are these differences, you could say that the three are synergistic and

complementary, rather than mutually exclusive as most people would agree that a good coach trains and mentors, a good trainer coaches and mentors, and a good mentor trains and coaches.

In order to coach, it help to use a few facilitating techniques:

- Draws people out:
  - "What do others think?" or "What do you think?"
  - "I've heard from (name) so far...are there any other thoughts?"
  - "And what else?"
  - Silence (20-30 seconds) - gives the learners a chance to think. Also, groups tend to abhor silence, if you wait long enough someone will usually speak up.
  - "(Name), you look like you have something to say..."
- Interprets comments:
  - Words verses tune or tone (many questions are not really questions but a need for self-assurance).
  - Intent verses wording (learners often have a hard time wording new subject matters).
  - Sees beyond the learners paradigms and filters.
- Clarifies thoughts or comments
- Use models and experiences to bring life to the subject.
- Looks for multiple points to expound on the subject.
- Looking for similarities and differences.
- Senses group energy
- Sparks up the group with various energizers.
- Takes breaks as needed.
- Has a sense of timing.

### **Handling objections**

- Try not to personalize (the learners will become defensive).
- Reflect on the objection for a moment to ensure you understand the objection.
- Encourage conversation.
- Remember to breath and relax.
- How we treat each other:
  - Accepting each other into the group.
  - Individual responsibility.
  - Being right verses being successful.

- Influence verses dominance (pull rank).
- Confidentiality and trust.
- Supporting each other.
- Active listening.
- Conflict resolution.
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### **Process or Environmental Problems (Not Related to Employees)**

Many performance problems are due to bad process, that is, the process does not support the desired behavior. It has often been said that people account for 20% of all problems while bad processes account for the rest. This could require use of other means of correction, e.g., reengineering, reorganization, etc.

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### **Resources**

Just because the problem is caused by a lack of resources or technology, does not mean expenditures are needed. Remember, the fix does not have to be the same as the cause. In this case you might be able to get with your team to brainstorm new processes or procedures that will eliminate the need for new resources.

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### **Motivation**

Often the employee knows how to perform the desired behavior correctly, the process is good, and all resources are available, but for one reason or another, chooses not to do so. It now becomes a motivational issue. Motivation is the combination of a person's desire and energy directed at achieving a goal. It is the cause of action. Motivation can be intrinsic - satisfaction, feelings of achievement; or extrinsic - rewards, punishment, or goal obtainment. Not all people are motivated by the same thing, and over time their motivation changes.

For more tips on motivation, see other papers in this section.

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