



Topics:

- Objectives and targets
- Positive focus
- Problem solving
- Recognition and feedback
- Reducing unacceptable behaviour

Develop High-Performance Teams



Objectives and targets

As the saying goes, “If you don’t know where you are going to, it doesn’t matter how you get there.” Most people respond well when their performance is measured against clear, unambiguous objectives and targets. People like to know that their work contributes something of value and they like to achieve objectives and targets for the satisfaction they gain. Setting clear, achievable, realistic, measurable and time-bound objectives and targets is a first step in enabling you to provide meaningful feedback to your people concerning their performance. It’s a key plank in your performance management process.

What’s the difference between an objective and a target? An objective describes a desired state or condition. A target specifies how much of the desired state or condition. It quantifies the objective.

For example: My objective is to grow my business. My target is to grow my business by 10% within 12 months.

In relation to your team or workgroup, think about the actions below and decide which actions are not happening or could be improved in relation to **objectives and targets**.

Select up to 3 actions that need improvement. Specify what needs to happen, what could be done better? Then decide what actions that you need to initiate.

Record on your action plan – what, with whom, by when, status or next action.

Add to your ‘to do’ list or weekly planner.

Initiate actions.

Update your action plan.

Repeat the process with any other actions needing improvement.

Here is a checklist to explore how well objectives and targets are managed within your team.

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Consider the checklist below and answer the questions: What needs to happen? What could we do better? What do I need to do?

- Key practices relating to team performance are identified, discussed and agreed.
- Team objectives, standards and targets are set, accepted and achieved for these key practices.
- We are involved in the setting of team objectives and team targets.
- Team objectives, standards and targets are concise and unambiguous.
- We all have the same understanding of team objectives, standards and targets.
- How we all will be involved in trying to achieve the objectives is clarified and accepted.
- Team objectives/targets are specific, measurable, achievable and realistic (as applicable).
- Team objectives/targets fit into and comply with organisation policies and practices.
- Other areas whose actions can impact on team performance are consulted during the development of team objectives/targets.
- Team objectives/targets are free of jargon, are easy to understand, are communicated and documented where required.
- The appropriate resources to achieve team objectives/targets are explored and provided.
- A budget which will support the desired team objectives/targets is provided, if necessary.
- We measure whether team objectives/targets have been achieved and take remedial action where necessary.
- We check that team and individual performance is aligned with the team objectives/targets.
- We check and confirm that the team is capable of achieving its identified team objectives and targets.
- Key performance indicators for team performance are documented in workplace agreements, business plans and job/position descriptions.
- Key performance indicators for team performance are featured in performance agreements and performance appraisals.
- How the team will monitor its team performance is agreed and executed.
- We receive ongoing information about the organisations current goals and objectives and as a team our strategies and actions are aligned with them.
- Required adjustments in behaviours and actions are implemented effectively and appropriately.

‘Men like nails lose their usefulness when they lose direction and begin to bend.’

Walter Savage Landor, “Cromwell and Walter Noble,” Imaginary Conversations (1824-53)

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Positive focus

Do you have a team of 'can do, will do and do do' people? (Not to be confused with 'dodo' people).

Is the team atmosphere one more of negativity than positivity? Is the glass half full or half empty for your team? Is your team's outlook one of optimism or pessimism? OK, enough of the questions, I think you have got my drift. It is very annoying and can be de-motivating to be around people who constantly complain, who criticise everything and everyone, who look for the negative in every situation. Their constant carping can really get people down.

Negativity is a destructive force that eats away at the motivation of people who are exposed to it constantly. Some people become bitter and twisted because of their life and work experiences and there's not much you can do to change them. But you need to lessen the impact that they can have on others.

Your people will take their cues from you. To a large extent, it is up to you to lead and manage your team in such a way that people in your team are very clear that negativity is not tolerated. Constructive criticism and balanced, respectful debate around differing perceptions is fine and to be encouraged.

In relation to your team or workgroup, think about the actions below and decide which actions are not happening or could be improved in relation to **positive focus**.

Select up to 3 actions that need improvement. Specify what needs to happen, what could be done better? Then decide what actions that you need to initiate.

Record on your action plan – what, with whom, by when, status or next action.

Add to your 'to do' list or weekly planner.

Initiate actions.

Update your action plan.

Repeat the process with any other actions needing improvement.

Here is a checklist to explore how well a positive focus is managed within your team.

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Consider the checklist below and answer the questions: What needs to happen? What could we do better? What do I need to do?

- We explore other perspectives when people put a negative spin on situations.
- We talk about problems as opportunities to get something right or do it better.
- Our focus is to discuss problems and solutions, not just problems.
- Complaints are expressed in a balanced way showing both sides of the story.
- We show a 'can do' approach to customers as we make them aware of our compliance requirements.
- We act to address things that frustrate or bother us or we keep our negative thoughts to ourselves.
- We acknowledge that irritants, deviations from the plan, the unexpected, counter-productive behaviours from others, etc. all go with the territory and adopt a 'let's get on with it' approach.
- We look for opportunities to celebrate/communicate the successes, right efforts and achievements of team members.
- Whingeing, complaining and negativity is not encouraged nor supported.
- We allow people to let off steam but adopt an approach, "well, we don't like it, we can't change it, so let's learn how to live with it."
- People's perceptions of situations are broadened or informed by giving them different information, broader context, different perspectives or different interpretations.
- We maintain a focus on the business goals, the team goals and individual goals.
- Complaints or criticisms of policy and initiatives are kept 'in house'.
- We discuss change or new initiatives and agree a team strategy for implementation and for dealing with any negativity.
- If unknown, we seek the rationale behind changes or new initiatives from management.
- We accept that change and new initiatives are a fact of organisational life and while they may have flaws, if we weren't at least trying new ways of doing things we would stagnate and regress.
- The reasons for changes or new initiatives are explained to customers in the context that we can't meet everybody's needs or wants but we try to provide for most of people's needs or wants.
- We demonstrate an attitude – what is, is, and it is only how we respond to it which creates stress or frustration.

'The faultfinder will find faults even in paradise.'

Thoreau, '*Conclusion*,' *Walden* (1854)

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Problem solving

Get the monkeys off your back. How do you respond when one of your people brings a problem to you which you think they are capable of resolving? Do you hear yourself saying, “OK. Leave it with me. I’ll sort it out later.”?

In this situation, picture the problem as a monkey on this person’s back. Their intention is to get the monkey off their back and on to yours. Your intention is to get them to get rid of the monkey, that is, resolve the problem.

If you are accountable and responsible for resolving the problem, and you are the best person, then you deal with it. If the person is responsible and accountable **and** has the capability, then send a clear message that you expect them to deal with it.

There is no doubt that some people will attempt to pass the buck up the line. They will keep doing this for as long as you let them.

If people are attempting to leave their problems on your back and you know that they are capable of resolving them, try this approach:

A ‘buck passer’ will probably say to you, “We’ve got a problem.” At this point, focus on the thought - No. **We** don’t have a problem. **You** have a problem and that’s why we pay you - to resolve work problems. Your people will learn that they can’t pass the buck and also learn a useful problem solving process.

Coach them through this checklist, as relevant, asking this person to think about or do these things. Add your guidance when needed:

- Identify and define the problem.
- Identify the root cause/s of the problem.
- Avoid making ‘snap’ judgements about what the problem is.
- Discuss and agree the symptoms of the problem.
- Agree the desired outcomes when the problem is resolved.
- Involve key stakeholders in the whole process of resolving the problem.
- Focus on the facts of the situation as opposed to assumptions and inferences which may be inaccurate.
- Check for hidden or underlying causes.
- Generate alternative solutions to the problem.
- Discuss all suggestions of solutions.
- Evaluate the alternatives suggested by weighing up the pros and the cons.
- Select the alternative that best resolves the root causes of the problem
- Discuss the consequences of the decision and how it may affect all stakeholders.
- Identify what changes to organisation policy will be required to implement the decision.
- Identify any likely opposition to the implementation strategy.

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- Involve staff affected by the changes during the planning and implementation stages.
- Implement the new ways to do things which will solve the problem.
- Work at getting active support and participation from all stakeholders.
- Identify the who, when, how, what and where during the planning and implementation stages.
- Check that the problem has been solved.
- Ask staff what improvements they think have taken place after implementation.
- Correct any errors and modify decisions if necessary.
- Identify and provide training and support where needed during implementation.
- Discuss with others what is required from them to support the decisions made to solve the problem.
- Conduct regular reviews of the progress of the decisions made.
- Discuss the benefits that have resulted from the decisions made.

‘I was never satisfied with a problem that I understood only partly. I wanted to understand it as completely as I could.’

David Sarnoff, 1891-1971, Founder and President, RCA, *Wisdom of Sarnoff and the World of RCA*.

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Recognition and feedback

We all know the benefits of recognition and feedback on performance. But here's the problem. We are too busy to give our people recognition and feedback and we expect them to always do what needs doing to the best of their ability. That's fair. The tricky part is that many of the messages people get are mainly about the things they didn't do well. So, from their point of view, all they hear is criticism. They think that their good work goes unrecognised and unacknowledged.

Even your worst employee does some good things, even if it's only turning up for work on the right days and knowing their name. If you are looking for examples of incompetence or unacceptable work standards, you will find them. But the converse applies as well. Look for examples of competence and above-average performance, and you will find them. Balance any negative feedback with positive feedback.

And, to make this a two-way street, what feedback do you seek on your performance?

In relation to your team or workgroup, think about the actions below and decide which actions are not happening or could be improved in relation to **recognition and feedback**.

Select up to 3 actions that need improvement. Specify what needs to happen, what could be done better? Then decide what actions that you need to initiate.

Record on your action plan – what, with whom, by when, status or next action.

Add to your 'to do' list or weekly planner.

Initiate actions.

Update your action plan.

Repeat the process with any other actions needing improvement.

How well are you managing recognition and feedback within your team or workgroup? Here is a checklist to explore how well a positive focus is managed within your team.

Consider the checklist below and answer the questions: What needs to happen? What could we do better? What do I need to do?

- The need for and benefits of providing feedback on performance are discussed and agreed.
- We identify the expectations and perceptions of team members in relation to the extent of recognition and feedback they would like.
- We explore the best ways to provide recognition and feedback.
- We look for opportunities to acknowledge the good performance of team members.
- We provide regular recognition and feedback to each other and to the team.
- We feel comfortable enough to share reactions with other team members on their behaviours and its impact upon the team and individual so we can continuously improve performance.
- We learn from our mistakes and amend what is required to ensure we utilise mistakes for learning and as a process for continuous improvement.
- We provide appropriate feedback covering things done well and things to improve.

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- We acknowledge “right efforts” as much as “right results”.
- We seek feedback on our own performance.
- We make provision for rewards and recognition to be given for good performance.
- We praise in public, criticise in private.
- We check that the intention of the feedback was received and understood.
- Feedback is directed towards behaviour about which the person can do something.
- Counter-productive behaviour is described rather than evaluated when giving feedback on performance.
- We provide a balance between positive and negative feedback.
- We receive feedback and utilise it as a basis to improve our own and team performance.
- We spend time coaching one another and constructively debating how we could all stretch ourselves to be better than we are. We implement the outcomes of the discussions willingly.
- The performance indicators used to evaluate team and individual performance are known and accepted.
- The required performance standards for each team member are discussed and accepted.
- We regularly compare our current performance against our benchmarks (expectations, Key Performance Indicators) and make adjustments to ensure we are performing optimally.
- Feedback is given at the earliest opportunity about the particular behaviour to be addressed.
- The needs of the person receiving feedback are taken into account.
- As a team we provide appropriate feedback to our leader on the role they currently play with the team, we include specific suggestions for changes, if required.

‘There is probably no man living, though ever so great a fool, that cannot do something or other well.’

Samuel Warren, 1807 – 1877, English writer

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Reducing unacceptable behaviour

Everybody in your team or workgroup knows what is acceptable and what is unacceptable. Right? They are all capable people and they know what is right and what is wrong. Probably. So why do unacceptable things happen from time to time. Human nature? Lack of skills? Lack of knowledge? Lack of will? Well, all of these could apply.

It is a given that your people will from time to time, do or say things which are just not acceptable. And when something happens that you know is not acceptable you need to act decisively and fast. If you do nothing, you encourage the unacceptable behaviour to continue and you lose the respect of other people within your team. Importantly, don't worry about the trivial stuff. If there is no significant consequence on anybody, let it go. Just make sure that your people know where the line is drawn between unacceptable behaviour and acceptable behaviour.

How well are you reducing unacceptable behaviour in your team or workgroup?

In relation to your team or workgroup, think about the actions below and decide which actions are not happening or could be improved in relation to **reducing unacceptable behaviour**.

Select up to 3 actions that need improvement. Specify what needs to happen, what could be done better? Then decide what actions that you need to initiate.

Record on your action plan – what, with whom, by when, status or next action.

Add to your 'to do' list or weekly planner.

Initiate actions.

Update your action plan.

Repeat the process with any other actions needing improvement.

Review this checklist to explore how well unacceptable behaviour is resolved within your team.

Consider the checklist below and answer the questions: What needs to happen? What could we do better? What do I need to do?

- Things we do which could damage team performance are identified and remedied.
- We identify where most unacceptable actions/behaviour occurs in the processing of work and in teamwork.
- The consequences of unacceptable actions/behaviour on us and others are discussed and agreed.
- The causes of unacceptable actions/behaviour are identified and remedied.
- Ways to reduce unacceptable actions/behaviour are explored and executed.
- We identify those people who need additional coaching or training to help them eliminate unacceptable actions/behaviour in their work.
- Faulty equipment which may cause unacceptable actions/behaviour is identified and remedied.
- Faulty systems or procedures which may cause unacceptable actions/behaviour are identified and remedied.

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- Pressures and demands that contribute to unacceptable actions/behaviour are identified and reduced, modified or eliminated.
- Attitudes and behaviours that are unacceptable are identified and changed.
- We take particular action to prevent incidents where there is a high degree of monotony and repetition which could lead to unacceptable actions/behaviour.
- We discuss with other areas the things they do which have a detrimental effect on us.
- We collaborate with other areas to eliminate or modify unacceptable actions.
- We push to make changes to things that need to change in relation to team behaviour.
- We identify, define, document and monitor the application of key systems and procedures which must be followed to eliminate unacceptable actions/behaviour.
- We explore and execute better ways to perform unacceptable activities.
- Standard team procedures and behaviour standards for the key things we do are agreed and applied.
- We agree ways to check that all people comply with our teamwork policy, procedures and standards.
- We check regularly that all people are complying with team behaviour standards.
- The efforts of those who act to reduce unacceptable activities are acknowledged and recognised.
- Management do what needs doing to help reduce unacceptable activities.

‘Those who do not prevent crimes when they could, encourage them.’

Cato the Elder, 234-149 B.C., Roman soldier, administrator, and statesman.