

Manage the People Stuff



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Choices and consequences. Performance counselling

When a man asks your advice, he usually tells you just how he expects you to decide.

EDGAR WATSON HOWE, Country Town Sayings (1911)

We may give advice but we cannot inspire conduct.

LA ROUCHEFOUCAULD, Maxims (1665)

A hundred sage counsels are lost upon one who cannot take advice; a hundred bits of wisdom are lost upon the unintelligent.

Panchatantra (c. 5th c.), 1, tr. Franklin Edgerton

Counselling is about identifying the underlying causes of problems and agreeing how to address the cause. Personal problems often affect people's work and their health. We assume the role of counsellor by virtue of our position as the person's manager. In many cases we may be unable to solve the problem, but at least we can provide a starting point.

Providing advice by telling a person to do or not to do something doesn't always have the required effect. To solve the problem will probably require a sustained effort. To get that sustainable positive solution takes more time and considered effort than many of us are able or willing to do.

Having said all that, there are some things which we can say and do which will make the counselling process easier.

- Speak to staff members in private away from their peers and, in most circumstances, without their peers knowing.
- Encourage the staff members to discuss their problems with you by creating a climate specific to discussing these sorts of issues.
- Describe your observations without using any judgemental adjectives or evaluations of their behaviour.
- Encourage the staff member being counselled to start the conversation.
- Ask them where they see the root of the problem to be.
- Listen actively to what they are saying by paraphrasing their main points.
- Avoid making value judgements, i.e. avoid saying whether things are good or bad, right or wrong.

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- Refrain from apportioning blame to the cause of the problem.
- Focus on the offending behaviours and not the person. Do this by saying things like “when you lose your temper it is unsettling to the others in the office.” rather than “You are unsettling to others in the office when you lose your temper.”
- Explain the consequences of any behaviour in question - explain how it affects others, staff morale, productivity, customers’ perceptions about the organisation and interpersonal relationships.
- Offer to provide professional advice where you may not be able to help.
- Avoid taking sides where a problem involves more than one party.
- Separate fact from assumption.
- Ask people for their opinions, what they think and how feel about the situation.
- Ask the staff member for their consent to document issues of a sensitive nature should you feel further action needs to be taken by someone other than yourself.
- Assure the staff member that the discussions you are holding are confidential if you are not going to tell anyone else.
- Avoid discussing confidential matters with others - use a hypothetical situation if you are seeking answers to a problem.
- Ask the staff member for their consent to inform others should you feel it to be necessary.
- Treat all problems as important to the other person regardless of your impressions.
- Provide an opportunity for the staff member to calm down should they be upset.
- Encourage staff members to solve their own problems.
- Offer to brainstorm solutions.
- Ensure your body language is supportive of their feelings.
- Hold discussions in a neutral environment.
- Provide undivided attention during the counselling session.



Switch off and switch on. Performance counselling.



When the performance of a good worker deteriorates for no apparent reason, there is a good chance that the employee has a personal problem weighing heavily on their mind. There are many factors which affect a person's job performance, but off-the-job problems are more often the cause of poor work performance than many managers realise.

These are problems related to some event occurring in their personal life such as death or illness in the family, divorce or the break-up of a relationship, problems with their children, financial difficulties, etc.

What a person does in their private life is of course their concern, but if it starts to affect their performance at work, it becomes the manager's concern. Some action is required on the part of the manager, but this needs to be handled carefully and with sensitivity.

Your major purpose is not to provide a solution - it is highly unlikely that you can. Your main aim is to let the person know that she or he can talk to you about it if they want to and that you will listen and act as a sounding board. As professional counsellors will tell you, just letting a person 'get it off their chest' helps them feel much better about their problem. Time to put on your 'counsellor' hat.

- Be wary of imposing your solution on their problem - be prepared to do more listening than talking. Demonstrate that you really are listening by paraphrasing things they say and acknowledging how they might be feeling and how you would feel in the same circumstances.
- Begin by acknowledging their previous good performance.

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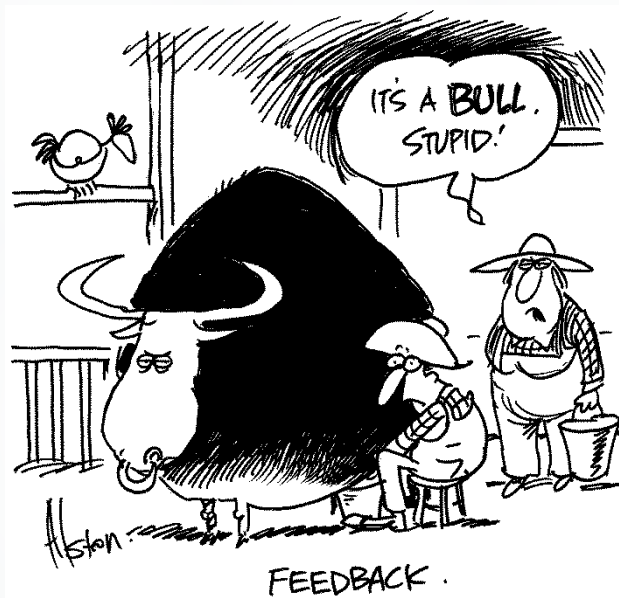


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- Let them know that you value them as a person and as a worker.
 - Tell them that you have noticed a change in their behaviour. Describe the specific changes.
 - Describe how you see these changes affecting their work and the work of others.
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- Ask them how they feel they are currently handling their job. Reach agreement on your view and their view of their job performance.
 - Check if there are any problems at work which are affecting them.
 - Tell them that their private life is their business, but when it starts to affect their work it has to become your business.
 - Assure them that anything you discuss will be kept strictly confidential and that no record of this conversation will be kept.
 - Re-assure them that every one of us has personal problems which affect us at some time or other. If possible, cite an example of something which you had to deal with which really got you down.
 - Encourage them to open up and discuss what it is that is distracting them.
 - Ask them if they need some time off to deal with the problem.
 - Ask them if they need help in dealing with their problem.
 - Ask them if they would like to 'brainstorm' some actions they could take to help resolve their problem.
 - Help them develop an action plan.
 - Let them know that you will be supportive and that you can make allowances, but that their job performance needs to return to normal.
 - Suggest appropriate professional counselling such as Lifeline.
 - Suggest that you meet again in a week's time to see how things are.
 - Invite them to talk to you about it at any time.



Don't say "don't". Feedback.



Feedback is about providing information to staff on their performance - about how they are going. When providing feedback, it is easy to fall into the trap of focusing only on the negative. To use the word "don't" may be more of a hinder than a help.

Firstly, it produces a degree of resentment from the person to whom the feedback is being directed. Secondly, it focuses only on what the person shouldn't do and consequently does not provide any specific instruction or information about what they should do. Next time somebody says "don't" to you, take time out to think of how you respond, how you feel, what you think and whether you know what corrective action to take.

Here are some things you can say which will help you provide constructive feedback in a way that is quite acceptable to the recipient. Don't forget, feed them with positives every time. (Did I say 'don't'?) There are five points to consider.

- what they should do more of

"This is great work. I'd like to see you do more of this."

"Well done, I would like to see you do it this way every time you do this job."

"If it could be done to this standard every time it would be great. I would be really happy seeing you do more of this."

- what they should continue doing



“Keep this up. This is exactly how we want it done.”

“I am really pleased. Keep doing it this way because it makes the work easier for all of us.”

“Do exactly what you are doing now. This is really getting the results we want. Great work.”

- **what they should start doing**

“Good work. Now you have got this far I would like you to start doing.....”

“What you have done so far is very good. The next step to do is..... which is what I would like you to do the next time we are working on this project.”

“Let’s start doing this now, seeing that you have really got a good understanding of the first part.”

- **what they should do less of**

“What you have done so far in this area is what I want. When you are doing this bit try to do less of this and it will help reduce problems later on.”

“We’ve got this bit right. Next time try doing a little less of that and you will find it a great help.”

“To make life easier for you and to get the job done more efficiently do less of this bit.”

- **what they should stop doing**

“If you stop doing this it will speed up the process considerably.”

“Did you know if you do this and stop doing that it makes a big difference to the accuracy?”

“Good work in this section here. Next time try to resist the temptation of doing this and the whole thing will be perfect.”

As with all considered responses, this approach will take a little more of your time – which is one reason why it is easier to jump into the knee-jerk reaction ‘don’t’ mode. But the consequences for you and the other person of this considered approach will more than justify the time.



Resume the position. Job descriptions



An essential management tool is a job or position description. It needs to be up to date, accurate and informative. Here is a guide for preparing a position description.

Position Summary

- Why does the position exist? Why is the position needed? What is the major outcome of the job, i.e. what is the main thing the job is meant to achieve?

Or

- What are the major task areas or what are the major results the position should produce?
- Title of immediate supervisor?
- Number of people reporting to this position?

Position Duties and Responsibilities

- What are the main tasks or activities which must be carried out in doing this job? How do you go about doing these things?
Write statements incorporating **what** is done and **how** it is done. Write the statements in order of priority. Which is the most important task? Which is the next most important task? etc.



Position Requirements

- Knowledge - What things must be known to enable a person to do this job?
- Skills - What skills (actions) must a person be able to perform to do the job?
- Abilities - What physical or mental activities must the person be capable of to do the job?
- Attitudes – What attitudes will the person need to be successful in this job?

Minimum Qualifications

- What are the minimum education or trade requirements?
- What are the minimum experience requirements?
- What are the minimum training requirements?

Limits of Authority

- For what activities necessary to do this job are you required to gain the approval of your immediate manager, e.g. expenditure above a certain amount, dismissal of staff, hiring of staff, use of equipment, etc.?

Client and Supplier Relationships - Internal and External

- With which other key people do you have regular interaction in your work? What is the purpose of these interactions? To do what? To obtain what?
- What information, materials and services does this position provide and to whom?
- What information, materials and services does the position receive and from whom?

Key Performance Indicators

- For each major task or activity ask - if a person was performing this task successfully, what concrete things would you see happening? How would you know? What evidence would there be?

Some managers think that job descriptions are a waste of time. If that is you, here is simple alternative. On one or two pages, state clearly the following using two columns.

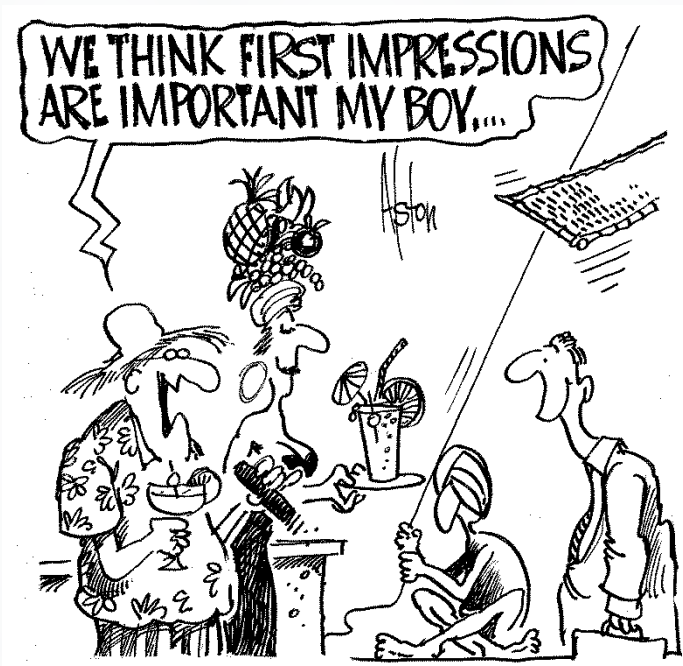
- (1) Outcomes I expect you to deliver.
- (2) My expectations about how you will deliver each outcome.



OUTCOMES	EXPECTATIONS
<input type="checkbox"/>	<input type="checkbox"/>
	<input type="checkbox"/>
etc	<input type="checkbox"/>
	etc

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First impressions stick. Induction.



Sweating palms, sweaty under arms, rapid pulse, butterflies in the stomach, nervous laughter.... all symptoms of the first day at work.

Can you remember your first day at work? Can you remember your first day in your current job? What were you thinking? How did you feel? How long did it take you to find out vital information about the organisation and what your job entailed?

Why do we induct new staff? Some of the key benefits in inducting new staff properly are greater productivity earlier, enhanced workplace satisfaction and it enables them to fit into the team more quickly and easily.

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Someone needs to assume responsibility for the induction of new staff into the organisation. Usually this rests with the line manager. The new staff member will be far happier if the person carrying out the induction follows these tips.

- ❑ Prepare an induction plan.
 - ❑ Introduce the new staff member to other staff with whom they will be working near or with.
 - ❑ Prime other staff to be welcoming and enthusiastic.
 - ❑ Introduce them to all management with whom they will come into contact.
 - ❑ Provide a list of names, titles, numbers and locations of colleagues to help the new person remember who's who.
 - ❑ Welcome the new staff member publicly.
 - ❑ Arrange for a guided tour of the organisation.
 - ❑ Explain the basic, vital ways things are done at your organisation, e.g. messages, leave, security, stationery, parking, safety requirements, emergency evacuation procedures, etc.
 - ❑ Provide a 'minder' for the new staff member. Someone who is competent and has a positive attitude.
 - ❑ Demonstrate how to use all equipment and technology relevant to their job.
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- ❑ Show them where all equipment is kept.
 - ❑ Explain protocols for using all technology.
 - ❑ Ensure that their work station is clean, tidy and prepared.
 - ❑ Clarify your expectations of them for the first month.
 - ❑ Discuss what support you will provide in this first month.
 - ❑ Provide a key to their work area.
 - ❑ Discuss organisational strategic priorities.
 - ❑ Explain our key products and services.
 - ❑ Explain how our organisation is structured.
 - ❑ Discuss issues unique to the organisation environment and customers.
 - ❑ Provide them with important contact numbers - yours, security.
 - ❑ Provide them with a schedule of organisation 'events' which occur on a regular basis.
 - ❑ Provide time for the inductee to absorb the information they have been given.
 - ❑ Set aside time for the staff member to ask questions after they've been at the organisation for two weeks.
 - ❑ Inform them of the normal communication procedures.



A good start. Induction.

Use this basic checklist to help with staff induction.

Basic Induction Checklist

PERSON RESPONSIBLE FOR INDUCTION:		
EMPLOYEE NAME:	JOB TITLE:	START DATE:
INDUCTION NEEDED		COMPLETED/COMMENT
1. Introduction to organisation - general background information about the company.		
2. Policy on: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • smoking • parking • what to do if you are late or ill • signing on / signing off - time sheets • security • EEO, discrimination 		
3. Details of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • conditions of employment / workplace agreements • job description • contract of employment • payment method and procedures • superannuation (occupational) / sick leave entitlements • hours of work / possible or likely overtime • break times - lunch, morning and afternoon breaks 		
4. Tour of premises including location of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • lunchroom / canteen / eating area • toilets / bathroom • other recreational facilities • warehouse • service area • office and administration areas • production 		

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INDUCTION NEEDED	COMPLETED/COMMENTS
5. Introduction to relevant managers / staff / co-workers. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Description of other related operations / names of staff with whom they may come into contact. 	
6. Sources of advice and assistance in the company. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Name, location, contact details, role. 	
7. Health and safety requirements. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> location of first aid kit location of emergency exits / evacuation routes introduction to the safety officer/warden location of fire extinguishers emergency numbers and call signals key safety requirements of their job 	
8. Quality assurance. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> summary of quality assurance description of all procedures relating to them and relevant work instructions 	
9. Details about and issuing of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> IT equipment, e-mail protocol safety equipment, e.g. hard hat, glasses, ear muffs tools likely to be used other equipment - e.g. phone, fax, photocopier supplies including stationery, ordering process 	
10. On-the-job training required (List below)	



As good as it gets. Performance appraisal.

The greatest of faults, I should say, is to be conscious of none.

THOMAS CARLYLE,
On Heroes, Hero - Worship and the Heroic in History (1841), 2.

The faultfinder will find faults even in paradise

THOREAU, 'Conclusion,' Walden (1854)

How will your staff know how they are going if you don't tell them? If you're going to tell them then how will you do it and what will you tell them? Are they going to believe you? Will it make any difference anyway?

There are two things we need to consider when appraising staff performance:

1) Positive feedback - which is given:

- ☐ when an employee is putting in a consistently good performance
- ☐ whenever an employee puts in an exceptionally good performance
- ☐ when an employee's performance improves after constructive criticism

2) Constructive criticism - which is given:

- ☐ when an employee's performance does not come up to the required standards.

The aspects of performance that need to be assessed are:

- initiative and problem solving
- punctuality and attendance
- safe work behaviour
- care of tools, equipment
- quality / accuracy of work
- quantity of output
- job knowledge
- dependability
- correct work procedures
- cooperation with employees / supervisor / manager / customers



In addition to the ongoing feedback that managers give on an 'as needs' basis, formal performance appraisals are made every six to twelve months during a performance appraisal discussion.

There should be no 'surprises' in the feedback given during the performance appraisal discussion. It is an opportunity to review the previous six to twelve months on the job and plan for improvement in the future.

(a) **The Performance Appraisal Record**

This is a written document which the manager completes before the staff appraisal discussion. The staff member to be appraised also receives a copy of the document and is encouraged to complete it prior to the performance appraisal discussion.

(b) **The Performance Appraisal Discussion**

This is a 'formal' discussion in the sense that it is important, scheduled and has a definite purpose and structure. Managers use a Performance Appraisal checklist (see following) to guide the discussion and plan improvement strategies.

(c) **The Follow-up Discussion**

Where necessary a follow-up discussion is held after four weeks. This is done to review the progress of improvement strategies agreed to at the Performance Appraisal Discussion.

Performance Appraisal documentation is filed and may be used when counseling, salaries, promotions, bonuses, or retrenchments are being considered.



Was it good for you too? Performance appraisal.

Before the discussion:

- Complete the Performance Appraisal documentation before the employee's performance appraisal discussion. This is done by the person who will conduct the discussion. Normally, this will be the staff member's manager - you.
- Be fair to the person being appraised. Give yourself plenty of time to do this properly. A rushed preparation by you will indicate the degree of importance you attach to the process.
- Check that you understand the duties and requirements of their position before completing the form (see next page for a basic appraisal form).
- Refer to their job description if necessary.
- Assess each category separately. Unless you are careful, the 'halo' effect may influence your thinking. An employee who is excellent in one or more areas isn't necessarily excellent in all areas. Also, an employee who is below standard in one or two areas isn't necessarily poor in all areas. Your appraisals will be better if you are objective and analytical in the way you assess performance for each category. To be objective requires you to look only at the facts and then form your opinion from there.
- Separate quality and quantity. It is important that you don't allow a high rating for 'quantity of work' to influence your rating for 'quality of work'.
- Review each category independently.
- Avoid focusing only on recent behaviour or on single incidents. The review is for a chosen period and is an overall assessment of the staff member's work behaviour. Unless you are aware of the possibility, it is easy to let a recent poor or excellent performance influence your view of the total review period. Beware of being unduly influenced by a recent event.
- Write in one or more examples of behaviour for each rating which is typical of the staff member's performance. Specific examples have more meaning to them than broad generalisations and they will help you to conduct better performance appraisal discussions.



Improving individual performance – Performance Appraisal

EMPLOYEE	JOB TITLE					
MANAGER	APPRAISAL DATE					
AREAS OF PERFORMANCE	Outstanding Performance	Above Average Performance	Standard Performance	Below Average Performance	Unsatisfactory Performance	N / A
Initiative and Problem Solving Comment:						
Punctuality and Attendance Comment:						
Safe Work Behaviour Comment:						
Care of Equipment/Use of technology Comment:						
Quality/Accuracy of Work Comment:						
Quantity of Output Comment:						
Job Knowledge Comment:						
Dependability (follows through on job) Comment:						
Correct Work Procedures Followed Comment:						
Cooperation (with employees/manager) Comment:						



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Tell it as it really is



OK. You have done the smart and fair thing by putting aside time to prepare for this discussion so that now you are prepared to have a useful and rewarding exchange.

During the discussion

- Choose an appropriate time and place to conduct the discussion. Performance appraisal discussions are important and should be conducted at a time and in a place which will do most to foster a worthwhile exchange of information.
- Avoid interruptions. The appraisal discussion should be completed in one sitting. Take whatever steps are necessary to ensure that you and the employee will have at least 45 - 60 minutes of uninterrupted time.
- Put the employee at ease. Taking a minute or so to do this will help you to establish the right atmosphere for a worthwhile performance appraisal discussion.
- Review each item on the appraisal document. While your aim is to discuss each item on the appraisal form, it is better if you avoid reading from it.



Refer to it, but maintain eye contact. Your aim is to create an atmosphere which is as friendly and natural as possible.

- Encourage discussion. As you review each of your main points, encourage the employee to give you his / her point of view. Ask them to provide reasons for their actions or examples of what they have done well. Ask them to suggest ways they could do their job better and what needs to be done by you to enable this to happen.
- Check to see if you will change any comments you made. If you decide to, do so there and then.
- Summarise the main points of the discussion. After all the points have been discussed as fully as possible, summarise the employee's strengths and areas which need improvement. There should be agreement on what you write.
- Complete the appraisal documentation. This is an official document and needs to be signed and dated. It is also important that the employee feels free to write their comments in addition to any which you make.
- Explain the follow-up procedures. The employee needs to know that you will follow up on and record the progress of any improvement plans made during this discussion.
- Close the discussion. After covering all the items on the appraisal document, including a plan for improvement (if necessary) it is appropriate to ask if the employee has anything else they would like to talk about. It is also appropriate to:
 - (a) reassure the employee of your interest in their progress and
 - (b) indicate your willingness to discuss problems or concerns at any future time

When you have reached a natural stopping point close the discussion on a positive note.

"Thanks Henry. Now as you know more than most, I don't practice what I preach. But that's tough luck for you. So it is a case of do as I say, not do as I do. Got it?" (Just kidding, but it might be a bit close to the truth.)

Seriously:

"Thanks Henry. I found this exchange valuable. Look we can all - you, me, the others – continually work at being the best we can. It just takes a level of awareness – which is why we have this discussion – staying focused and

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constant, correct practice. I thank you for your efforts and I encourage you to work on the couple of areas we have agreed.”