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When Setting Expectations for Employees, Establish the Right Outcomes

By Susan M. Heathfield,

According to the book, *First, Break All The Rules: What the World's Greatest Managers Do Differently*, great managers assist each individual to establish goals and objectives that are congruent with the needs of the organization. They help each employee define the expected outcomes, what success will look like upon completion. Then, they get out of the way.

In my experience, most work is performed by people who are not under the constant supervision of a manager. Given this fact, it makes sense to let the employee determine the right path to walk to accomplish her objectives. She will undoubtedly choose the one that draws upon her unique talents and ability to contribute to performance. The manager will want to establish the critical path and the check points for feedback, but to micromanage the employee is a mistake. The manager will drive himself crazy and lose good people who feel he doesn't trust them.

Human Resource professional can support this approach to management by coaching managers in more participative styles. You can establish reward systems that recognize managers who develop the abilities of others to perform and produce stated outcomes. You can promote the establishment of organization-wide goals to drive performance.

When Motivating an Individual, Focus on Strengths

Great managers appreciate the diversity of the people in their work group, state Buckingham and Coffman. They recognize that “helping people become more of who they already are,” since each person has unique strengths, will best support their success.

They focus on an individual's strengths and manage around his weaknesses. They find out what motivates each staff member and try to provide more of it in his work environment. As an example, if challenge is what your staff person craves, make sure he always has one tough, challenging assignment. If your staff member prefers routine, send more repetitive work in his direction. If he enjoys solving problems for people, he may excel in front-line service.

Compensate for staff weaknesses. As an example, you can find the employee a peer coaching partner who brings strengths he may lack to an assignment or initiative. Provide training to boost skills in needed areas of performance.

Human Resources professionals can assist by problem solving with managers who seek ideas for managing around weaknesses. You can make certain individual strengths are nurtured and that people have the opportunity to use their talents in their jobs. You can design reward, recognition, compensation, and performance development systems that promote a work environment in which people feel motivated to contribute. Consider the advice of the book's great managers who recommend, “**spend the most time with your best people.**”

Find the Right Job Fit for Each Person

A manager's job is not to help every individual he employs grow. His job is improving performance. To do this, he has to identify whether each employee is in the right role. Additionally, he needs to work with each person to determine what "growing in his role," and thus his ability to contribute to performance within the organization, means.

For some people, this may mean reaching for a promotion; for others, it means expanding the current job. Traditionally, people felt the only growth in the work place was "up" the promotional ladder. This is no longer true, and I doubt if it was ever best practice thinking. Buckingham and Coffman state, "create heroes in every role." Remember *The Peter Principle* which maintains that individuals are promoted to their level of incompetence?

The Human Resource professional must maintain a thorough understanding of positions and needs across the organization, to help each individual experience the right job fit. Familiarize yourself with the talents and capabilities of each person in your organization. Keep excellent documentation of testing, job applications, performance appraisals, and performance development plans.

Develop a promotion and hiring process which supports placing people in positions that "fit." Establish career development opportunities and succession plans that emphasize "fit" over experience and longevity.

As a Human Resources professional, if you can assist the managers and supervisors in your organization to understand and apply these concepts, you'll help create a successful organization of strong, talented contributing people. And, isn't that the type of workplace you'd like for yourself as well?