A MANAGER'S GUIDE TO IMPROVING WORKPLACE PERFORMANCE

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MANAGEMENT HAS EVERYTHING to do with performance. Performance improvement models lay a lot of responsibility for interventions on the supervisor's or line manager's shoulders. Who else but the "boss" sets expectations, provides feedback, motivates, rewards, holds accountable, provides the right tools, removes barriers, and generally holds sway over the work environment? Yet there has been a gap in resources for line managers—one that Roger Chevalier has helped fill with this book written for line managers.

With this book, Chevalier deftly bridges the gap between the practice (and jargon) of human performance technology (HPT) and the day-to-day work of line managers. He makes it clear that the manager's role is to create a workplace environment where people can succeed. The manager's job is to improve workplace performance, and the book presents an array of tools toward these ends.

GETTING INSIDE THE MANAGER'S HEAD

One of the book's strong suits is its ability to capture the way managers and supervisors think. Most managers do not wake up thinking about Herzberg's hygiene and motivator factors or McGregor's theory X and theory Y. They do wake up worrying about how to reach the production goals set by senior management, thinking about the performance appraisals due in a week, speculating how best to handle a problematic employee, and wondering if the team needs training yet again. Chevalier gets inside the line manager's head. His years of experience as an officer in the U.S. Coast Guard, expertise in leadership training, and understanding of human performance technology pay off in a book that translates HPT theory into sound management practice.

The book makes clear that most performance problems are rooted in the environment, not the person. Yet the job of a manager includes developing people. In fact, going back to Herzberg, work achievement, recognition, responsibility, growth, and advancement all contribute to employee satisfaction. More current research from Gallup Consulting (Harter, 2001; Thackray, 2001) has linked employee engagement with hard and measurable outcomes such as retention, productivity, and profitability. Engagement includes such factors as employees knowing what is expected at work, doing what they do best every day, receiving recognition or praise, and getting

feedback about personal progress. Managers control these factors, and their day-to-day interaction and planned development of employees contribute greatly to workplace performance.

HOW THE BOOK IS ORGANIZED

The book is organized into three sections. The first section deals with the manager's role in developing people and work groups. The second section focuses on identifying and removing barriers to individual and group performance. The third section summarizes and organizes all the tools presented in the first two sections, serving in effect as a job aid for the manager.

Section 1 frames the manager's job of developing people in two parts: the manager as coach and the manager as leader. Chapter 1 describes the performance coaching process, which includes setting clear expectations, defining activities and results, observing, providing feedback, recording performance, and adjusting goals as needed. Chapter 2 expands on the job of people development by presenting the situational leadership model developed by Paul Hersey and Ken Blanchard. It gives managers a tool for diagnosing different situations and choosing the leadership style with the highest probability of success. The theory part of situation leadership is balanced by examples and practical tips.

Chevalier next merges coaching with the situational leadership model and gives managers a job aid for conducting a performance counseling session. This innovative job aid gives structure to the performance coaching process. It guides managers through the stages, explains the type of questions they should be asking at each stage, and helps them assess what leadership style to use. The session will take different paths depending on the employee's responses. For example, if the manager sees a problem and the employee does not, then a style 1 leadership model is called for (high task and low relationship) as the manager directly communicates expectations and directs behavior. In the same way, if both the manager and employee acknowledge a performance problem, then a style 2 leadership style (high task and high relationship) is called for as the manager and employee work together to resolve the issue.

Section 1 continues with a discussion of employee motivation that touches briefly on Maslow hierarchies of needs and Herzberg's motivators and maintenance factors. A valuable part of this section on motivation, often neglected in management training, is a discussion of job design. Chevalier provides managers a basic understanding of job design and how job enrichment, rotation, and enlargement affect employee motivation and workplace results. Sec-

tion 1 concludes with a chapter on teamwork. Chevalier cuts to the chase by focusing on group dynamics. He points out that group norms are the most powerful force influencing productivity and overall team performance. Through examples and advice, Chevalier provides managers a road map for changing undesirable group norms and introducing new employees to desirable group norms.

Section 2 turns its attention to identifying and removing barriers to work performance, putting the tools of our trade directly into the manager's hands. Chevalier begins with a discussion on measurement, laying out the basics of measuring existing performance, setting measurable goals, and identifying the performance gap. He then leads managers through the process of gap analysis. He introduces managers to his updated version of Gilbert's behavior engineering model (1978) and adeptly guides them through the use of this tool to analyze the causes of the performance discrepancy. Always focused on the practical, Chevalier provides managers another exceptional tool: the performance analysis worksheet. Managers use this worksheet to define a performance gap, set a reasonable goal, and then identify and weight the driving and restraining forces contributing to the performance gap. The completed tool gives managers a simple yet graphic display of the performance gap and its causes. Simple, practical, and useful, this tool is one of the highlights of the book. A case study shows managers how to put it into action.

Chevalier follows problem analysis with a chapter on selecting the best solutions to close the performance gap. He advises managers that solutions need to be selected on the basis of the causes of the problem, the costs, and the organization's culture. Ideally solutions should maximize the driving forces and minimize the restraining forces of the performance problem. Using the updated Gilbert model again, Chevalier shows the direct link between causes and potential solutions. The model expands the manager's view of solutions beyond that of training and identifies how many are actually in the manager's control. He then resolves the case study, illustrating how the solution system tied directly to the problem causes.

Having empowered managers with performance analysis, Chevalier continues to share the HPT tool kit by devoting a chapter to change management. Using Lewin's unfreezing, changing, and freezing model, he emphasizes the importance of preparing an individual or group for change and reinforcing the desired behavior afterward. Chevalier offers an amusing personal story about preparing an individual to change that drills the key points home. The story involves his son, a stick shift, and a steep hill.

The levels-of-change model is another highlight of the book. A simple diagram shows the interplay between participative and directive change strategies. The examples

provided illustrate how both personal power and position power are generally needed for a sustained change effort.

Section 2 finishes with evaluation strategies, making the case and setting the expectation that managers are responsible for evaluating the results of any performance improvement initiatives they impose on an individual or work group. Chevalier points out that it is not sufficient to just determine the effectiveness of an intervention (short-term results); it is also necessary to determine its impact on business measures (long-term results). The section finishes with two powerful case studies illustrating level 3 and level 4 evaluations. Chevalier encourages managers to use evaluation as part of the intervention itself. The very act of measuring encourages performance improvement.

Section 3 is aptly entitled Synergy. It reproduces all the tools from the first two sections of the book and places them together in one last chapter. The narrative reviews the tools, but more important, describes how they work together. It highlights the synergy that results from managers conscientiously applying and combining these tools to develop a work environment where their people can succeed. The last chapter serves as a quick reference and launching point for using these tools on the job.

Overall, this book is an easy yet compelling read, dispensing advice in easily digestible bites. It is designed to be read by busy managers. Every concept in the book is accompanied by an exercise, example, story, or case study, or some combination of these. Every tool is explained and put to use on a real problem. Helpful tips summarize key points, and every chapter ends with an application exercise for managers, helping them integrate the concepts and apply them immediately and directly to their work situation.

WHY SO VALUABLE?

There are few books on our HPT bookshelf that directly address a manager's role in improving performance. Hale has given us *Performance-Based Management: What Every Manager Should Do to Get Results* (2003), which covers a broad array of interventions. We also have *The Six Disciplines of Breakthrough Learning* (2006) by Wick, Pollock, Jefferson, and Flanagan, which includes action

points for line leaders as well as learning leaders. We now add Chevalier's book to the bookshelf—although the book will not stay on the shelf for long. We will find ourselves handing it to the line managers we are working with to read and know that our message of performance improvement will get through. This book, written for managers by a manager, reaches its audience.

Chevalier's book is endorsed by no less an authority than Marshall Goldsmith, world-renowned executive coach and business leader. In the Foreword, Goldsmith asks "if managers are not improving workplace performance, why are they wasting the organization's valuable resources?" Goldsmith goes on to applaud the book's valid, practical advice and states unequivocally that "the tools in this book work!" The book also received the 2008 ISPI Award of Excellence for Outstanding Communication.

ISPI has a standard that endorses collaboration and partnership with clients. For many of us, managers are our clients, be they first-level supervisors, division managers, or chief executive officers. What better way to build a partnership and foster understanding of performance improvement than by sharing this book? 🔺

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