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Get and keep the job you want.

February's tips come from Corporate Coaching International's Managing Partner, Dr. Pam Erhardt. Having spent part of her career managing a department of nearly 600 employees at Cedars-Sinai Medical Center, Pam knows first-hand about the challenges of holding staff accountable for meeting goals and achieving outstanding performance.

Many companies have already reengineered, reinvented, or revitalized their organizations. One of the most crucial ingredients for success that often goes unexamined, however, is identifying tangible ways to measure individual and joint accountabilities. Holding employees accountable for their actions and results continues to be one of a manager's most challenging tasks. Managers tend to take the path of least resistance by tolerating inadequate performance, are vague about their expectations, or accusatory when expectations are not met. These choices do nothing to improve performance.

In my work as a manager, as well as an executive coach, I've found that a framework for building accountability into performance agreements can be extremely valuable. This framework can be used for both individuals and teams to define goals, collaborate on and commit to specific goals, monitor performance, and apply rewards (or other consequences). Here are 5 simple steps you can take to increase the likelihood of goal achievement:

1. **Define expectations.** Sit down with the employee or team and mutually agree on targets, objectives, behaviors, and performance standards. Put it in writing. This provides you with an excellent opportunity to explore the staff member's skills, knowledge-base, motives, and expectations or the team's needs. An important question to ask is "are these goals challenging and yet achievable?" It's also an appropriate time to discuss why the desired performance is important and how it relates to broader organizational goals. Make sure that you create *SMART* goals: specific, measurable, agreed upon, realistic, and time-bound.
2. **Monitor performance.** Many managers and supervisors forget about this critical step. Schedule time for a quarterly review of goals and outcomes (more frequent is OK too). Put on your coaching cap for these meetings. It's an opportunity to not only monitor performance but also coach your employee to even greater success. Praise what they are doing well. Explore where they are struggling. Are their difficulties the result of lack of skill, resources or knowledge? Ask the employee how you can assist them in improving their performance.
3. **Use neutral, yet descriptive, language.** Before meeting to discuss performance, make three columns on a piece of paper and label them (1) What's Working; (2) Where Are You Getting Stuck; and (3) What Needs to Be Done Differently. This allows you to discuss achievements in a non-judgmental, behavioral way. You can also ask the individual or team to prepare in a similar way before the review meeting.

4. **Apply consequences.** If you're a parent, you know the importance of saying what you mean, and meaning what you say. As a manager, it's equally important! When you've got a written agreement and are having regular conversations about performance, applying the consequences becomes less anxiety-ridden, even though it will never be easy. Remember that consequences can be positive or negative. Failure to reward success and accomplishment is just as serious an oversight as letting poor performance slide. In addition, rewards and consequences should be applied in a timely manner.
5. **Update performance expectations.** The easiest time to do this is when the team, department or company is revising its' own goals. When individual goals are aligned with organizational goals, it's easier for the staff member to see their own contribution. It also provides the coaching moment to explore development opportunities.

This framework for performance management is deceptively simple. It requires updated performance standards, metrics for monitoring success, attention to the developmental needs of your staff, and most importantly, FOLLOW UP. It's important to remember that cultures of accountability thrive when managers at all levels model the desired behavior. In other words, walk the walk and talk the talk. And remember... what you measure is what you get.

*As a reminder, my latest book, **Nice Girls Don't Get the Corner Office: 101 Unconscious Mistakes Women Make that Sabotage Their Careers**, is now available at www.amazon.com or at your local bookstore. Until next month, stay well.*

Best regards,

Lois P. Frankel, Ph.D.