

PAIN
less
performance
improvement

Manager's Workbook

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getting started

Enjoy this book and make it your own. The more you put into it, the more you'll get out of it. As cliché as that may sound, there's a lot of truth in it, so have fun and get ready to take the pain out of performance improvement!

Another Training Program? What's in It for You?

With your head already spinning from the many pressures of your job, do you really need yet another task that demands your time and attention? You're probably already mentally shaking your head "no." But this is not just another task. This is an opportunity to make your job easier and less stressful.

So what's in it for you? Why should you give this program your full attention and effort? A collaborative approach to performance improvement offers you the potential for:

- **Less stress:** The painless performance improvement process reduces common conflicts associated with performance problems.
- **Higher employee morale:** You're sending the message that you want your employees to succeed and that what they do matters.
- **Increased communication and trust between you and your employees:** Using this collaborative performance improvement process will show your employees that your actions as a leader match your words.
- **Lower turnover:** Saving even one employee from unnecessary termination saves you time and money.

Learning Objectives

When you have successfully completed this program, you will be able to:

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- **Identify common reasons for poor performance.**
- **Articulate the difference between attitudes and behaviors.**
- **Assess the prevailing attitudes you have about your current employees.**
- **Evaluate your own emotional hot buttons.**
- **Assess your employees' performance—good and poor—in behavioral terms.**
- **Define and put into practice the six-step painless performance improvement process.**
- **Recognize, and avoid, sidetracks during performance improvement discussions.**
- **Prepare for performance improvement discussions using the Six-Step Prep.**

How to Use This Guide

Painless Performance Improvement is a flexible program designed to meet your unique time requirements, learning objectives and learning style. Customize the program to best suit your needs.

Interactive Self-study—Use this manager's guide in conjunction with the *Painless Performance Improvement* DVD/video. Work through the manager's guide in your own time and at your own pace.

Colleague Study—Approach a colleague or two and put together a study team. Set aside a couple after-work sessions or two or three lunch hours to get together to view the film and discuss various sections of the manager's guide. Compare and share your answers and reactions with your colleagues for more powerful learning.

Note: If you choose this type of training, look for the Colleague Study Notes throughout this guide for added direction.

Workshop Training—The accompanying *Leader's Guide* turns this self-directed program into a highly effective group workshop. Following your training meeting, keep this manager's guide on hand as a ready reference.

CHAPTER ONE

performance improvement

Helping your employees succeed is what performance improvement is all about.

Why Bother?

Have you ever had an employee whose work efforts (or lack thereof) just exasperated you? Or one who seems to try but never hits the mark? Or maybe you've given up. *Why bother? He's a lost cause. She'll never make it.* Sound familiar? Most managers at one time or another have felt this way.

Just the idea of a performance improvement meeting with such an employee may make you feel tired. Tired of talking. Tired of teaching. Tired of preaching. Well, we're here to tell you, it doesn't have to be that way.

Less Pain, Less Stress

Strong leaders coach every day, and sometimes that means challenging an employee to improve. Since you're here, it's obvious that you want to be a strong leader, one who motivates, encourages, challenges and inspires. One who helps each employee succeed, and that's what performance improvement is all about.

Done right, performance improvement can be empowering and motivating for both you and your employees, and the drama and conflict that so often accompany performance improvement discussions will become a thing of the past. Sure, some employees will still get their walking papers. But more often, your employees will improve, employee morale will increase and you'll experience less stress and pain.

ACTIVITY:

Think of a Time

Think back on the times when you've had to discuss a performance problem with someone. Think about the situations, your discussions and the outcomes. If possible, contrast a situation in which your employee was successful with one in which your employee was not. (Record your thoughts on a separate paper.)

Your employee improved...

What was the performance problem?

How did you feel leading up to your conversation with your employee?

How did it go? What happened?

How did you feel following your conversation with your employee?

Did your employee's behavior change? Did your employee's performance improve?

What was the outcome? What happened to the employee?

Your employee did not improve...

What was the performance problem?

How did you feel leading up to your conversation with your employee?

How did it go? What happened?

How did you feel following your conversation with your employee?

Did your employee's behavior change? Did your employee's performance improve for the short-term?

What was the outcome? What happened to the employee?

Working with an employee to turn around a performance problem is never fun. And it's not easy. Look at your responses to the above questions again.

Did you remember specific behaviors that needed to be improved? Which recollection was stronger, the problem itself or how you felt? Compare both scenarios. Is there a distinct difference between how you felt and how the meetings went? Is there a correlation between how the meeting went and the outcome?

Wouldn't it be nice if you never had to deal with another performance issue again? Unfortunately, we live in the real world. So if performance problems are part of your world at work (and for most of us, they are), read on.

Colleague Study Note: Share your answers to the questions above. Talk about your experiences, how they are the same and how they differ.

Whose Problem Is It, Anyway?

Is it your problem when an employee fails to meet job standards? Is it your problem when an employee is late? Misses a deadline? Is rude to a customer? Or loses a sale? You bet. It's your team. Their problems are your problems.

Does that mean you are responsible for their success? Yes and no. This is where it gets confusing. If you have a performance problem on your team, it's your problem too. But if you own the problem or take full responsibility for it, you let your employee off the hook. Inadvertently, you're taking away your employee's accountability.

Yes, it's your responsibility to try to help your employees succeed, by coaching and offering your encouragement and support. After all, you're their leader and it's your job to help them succeed and attain the company's goals. But ultimately, it's up to your employees to improve.

Helping your employees succeed is different from being responsible for their success. That's what makes the six-step painless performance improvement process so powerful. This collaborative approach illustrates your commitment and your support but puts the responsibility for improving squarely on the shoulders of your employees.

Common Reasons for Poor Performance

Ignoring a performance problem doesn't make it go away. But sometimes it seems easier to let it go unnoticed. However, doing so usually only makes it worse.

It's easy to be frustrated by poor performance, especially when it's something that comes easy to you or is important to you. Just as you have strengths and weaknesses, so do your employees.

On the surface, you may see an employee who is lazy, doesn't care, and isn't working out. But before you label this person as a slacker, consider that there may be more to the problem than your employee's attitude—and yours (more on that later).

Basically, there are three reasons for poor performance—the 3Cs:

- **Communication**
- **Conditions**
- **Consequences**

Note: Most performance problems are the result of consequences—either inappropriate consequences or lack of consequences.

ACTIVITY:

Evaluating the 3Cs

Think about your team and your work environment as you work through the following checklist. This is a snapshot of your team's overall potential for performance problems. Be honest with yourself, and go with your first impression.

The 3Cs Checklist

Communication	YES	NO
My employees always know what is expected of them.	___	___
I communicate through staff meetings, announcements and one-on-ones.	___	___
My employees never receive directions through word of mouth.	___	___
I regularly offer feedback.	___	___
My actions always reinforce the company's priorities and values.	___	___
I am the only leader from whom my employees get direction and guidance.	___	___
I never address performance problems in a group setting.	___	___
Conditions	YES	NO
My employees always have enough time to succeed.	___	___
My employees always have the tools to succeed.	___	___
My employees have all the training they need to succeed.	___	___
Consequences	YES	NO
My employees know that what they do matters to me.	___	___
I regularly offer my employees encouragement for good work.	___	___

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YES **NO**

I **regularly** offer my employees praise and recognition for good work.

I **never** let poor performance or poor work habits go unnoticed.

When necessary, I challenge my employees to improve their performance.

I clearly communicate the consequences for failure to improve.

I **never** provide negative consequences for good performance (for example, giving tough or undesirable tasks to good performers).

I **never** provide positive consequences for poor performance (for example, giving a tough or undesirable task to someone else).

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF

Look at the statements to which you responded “no.” These are red flags to keep in mind when you prepare for a performance improvement discussion. For example, perhaps you answered “no” to the statement “My own actions always reinforce the company’s priorities and values.” That’s a red flag that you’re not acting on what’s important, and it may come back at you during a performance improvement discussion. If you’re addressing a customer service behavior, your employee may respond, “Well, I don’t see you jumping up to help customers when you’re involved in something else.”

Or, for example, perhaps you answered “no” to the statement “My employees always have the tools to succeed.” Don’t be surprised if you learn from

an employee that he or she doesn't have all the tools or support needed to succeed. Sometimes your employee may see things in a way that's different from the way you see things.

Take a moment to jot down a summary of your 3Cs assessment.

"My potential 3C weaknesses are":

Colleague Study Note: Discuss in your group the potential you have for performance problems stemming from the 3Cs: communication, conditions or consequences. Talk about the activity and whether you experienced any surprises.

ACTIVITY:

Case Studies—Part 1

We will follow three case studies throughout this manager's handbook. The purpose of these case studies is to help you process and apply what you are learning.

At times, you may feel as though you're speculating about or mentally adding to the case study, and that's fine. Doing so will make it more realistic for you. After reading the study, answer the questions and check your responses against the debrief.

Colleague Study Note: Discuss and debrief the case studies together. Talk about any situations you've experienced that may be similar.

STUDY #1

The Case of the Orderly Associate

THE PLAYERS:

Jason, an hourly associate at a clothing store

Kevin, the store manager

THE SCENARIO:

Jason spent the morning restocking the merchandise tables and folding and straightening the shirts, sweaters and slacks that are on sale. Kevin commented on how nice the sale tables look and how much he appreciated Jason's attention to detail.

By midmorning, Kevin notices that Jason seems a bit unsettled each time he has to stop what he is doing to help a customer. It becomes evident that the interruptions are starting to bother him. Kevin overhears Jason mutter under his breath that customers are slobs the way they just throw the clothes in a heap when they are finished with them. Kevin decides not to say anything because a customer walks in.

How do you think Jason is feeling right now? _____

How do you think Kevin is feeling right now? _____

What is the potential performance problem? _____

What may be the reason for this potential performance problem? Feel free to refer to the 3Cs checklist activity on pages 7-8. _____

Note: Based on the limited information offered in each case study, it's difficult to identify with any certainty the reason for the potential poor performance. However, considering each reason in relation to the case studies is a good exercise.

What would you do if you were Kevin? _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Study #1—The Case of the Orderly Associate

Compare your answers to the analysis below.

How the employee may be feeling:

Jason may be feeling frustrated. He seems focused on his task and may view the customers as an interruption. Resentment may be building as customers continue to make a mess of his efforts to straighten the merchandise.

How the manager may be feeling:

Kevin is concerned about Jason's lack of attention to their customers.

The potential performance problem:

Jason is putting more emphasis on folding and straightening than his interactions with customers. If he continues to speak negatively about them, or if his actions toward customers are negative or not in keeping with the company's customer service standards, then a customer service performance problem exists.

Reasons for the potential performance problem (the 3Cs):

There may be a lack of communication and/or a lack of consequences. Kevin praises Jason's efforts at straightening the tables, but we don't know whether he offers Jason praise or feedback for his customer interactions as well. If Kevin focuses his feedback primarily on tasks, he may be inadvertently communicating to his employees that things are more important than customers.

What would you do if you were Kevin?

The right thing to do is to address Jason's growing irritation with customers as soon as the next customer leaves. If you said you'd wait, you're not alone. Many managers would do the same. However, poor performance should never go unnoticed.

STUDY #2

The Case of the Grumbling Group Leader

THE PLAYERS:

*Kim, a group leader at a sheet metal plant
Sylvia, the floor manager*

THE SCENARIO:

At the five-minute shift-starter meeting this morning, Sylvia explained that management wants the Hornsby order finished a week earlier. Even as she explained that Hornsby needs the parts to make its delivery on time, she could see frustration setting in. Kim asked why management never asks the employees' opinion. Sylvia told her that it was a business decision and that she's confident everyone can pull together to meet the new deadline. Kim walked off saying, "Don't count on it. I'm not busting my butt for a stupid deadline. Nobody cares about what we do anyway." Sylvia is troubled about how Kim's comments might affect the team's ability to hit its deadline, especially because Kim is a group leader. Sylvia decides to let Kim go, though, thinking she needs to blow off some steam.

How do you think Kim is feeling right now? _____

How do you think Sylvia is feeling right now? _____

What is the potential performance problem? _____

What may be the reason for this potential performance problem? Feel free to refer to the 3Cs checklist activity on pages 7-8. _____

What would you do if you were Sylvia? _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Study #2—The Case of the Grumbling Group Leader

Compare your answers to the analysis below.

How the employee may be feeling:

Kim seems angry and resentful of management's decision to move up the deadline by a week. She seems to feel that management never

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considers the employees. Perhaps she feels management doesn't care about them or their efforts.

How the manager may be feeling:

Sylvia is worried about how Kim's grumbling might affect the deadline.

The potential performance problem:

Kim is complaining about management and the deadline change. If she continues to grumble, if her comments adversely affect other team members, or if her work is affected by her anger, then a performance problem exists.

Reasons for the potential performance problem (the 3Cs):

There may be a lack of communication and/or a lack of consequences. It's tempting to speculate that there is a lack of condition—perhaps not enough time to meet the deadline—but we don't know that for sure. What we do know, however, is that there is a communication problem. Kim's question of why management never asks their opinion suggests there is little communication and trust. There also seems to be a lack of consequences, supported by Kim's comment that nobody cares.

What would you do if you were Sylvia?

If you said talk to Kim immediately, you're right. And if you said let Sylvia cool down and then talk to her, that's OK too. The key here is addressing the potential problem before it escalates. If you said you'd let it go and wait to see what happens next, you may have a mess on your hands that impacts the entire group as well as your deadline.

STUDY #3

The Case of the Ambitious Account Rep

THE PLAYERS:

*Marcus, a graphic artist at an advertising company
Clarence, an advertising account rep
Deanna, the manager*

THE SCENARIO:

Deanna is concerned by what Marcus told her about another employee, Clarence, an up-and-coming account rep with ambition and drive. Until now, Deanna appreciated Clarence's self-motivated style and that he didn't require much time or attention.

Marcus said that until last week, he has always tried to ignore Clarence's malicious gossip. When Deanna asked him what changed, he said, "Clarence started bad-mouthing you and I thought you should know."

As Deanna returns to her office, she walks by Clarence's cubicle and overhears him telling a client that he'll handle the problem. She hears Clarence say that he doesn't like talking ill of other reps, but sometimes it's frustrating to be the one who is always cleaning up the messes. "Take down my extension," Deanna hears him say, "and call me directly next time." Deciding it is inappropriate to talk about hearsay, Deanna chooses to wait and see whether anything else happens.

How do you think Marcus is feeling right now? _____

How do you think Clarence is feeling right now? _____

How do you think Deanna is feeling right now? _____

What is the potential performance problem? _____

What may be the reason for this potential performance problem? Feel free to refer to the 3Cs checklist activity on pages 7-8. _____

What would you do if you were Deanna? _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Study #3—The Case of the Ambitious Account Rep

Compare your answers to the analysis below.

How the employees may be feeling:

It's difficult to know how Marcus and Clarence are feeling. Because it took Marcus a week to talk with Deanna, he may have been debating what to do. He may be feeling uncomfortable about talking to his boss about a co-worker, or he may just not like getting involved. Marcus may benefit from coaching on how to tell Clarence that he doesn't like listening to gossip or malicious comments. Clarence is probably feeling good, even happy, about the new business he has secured.

How the manager may be feeling:

We don't really know how Deanna may be feeling. Human nature suggests that she may be feeling hurt, angry or indignant after learning that Clarence has been bad-mouthing her.

The potential performance problem:

It's already a problem. Deanna overheard Clarence bad-mouthing another rep. And, if what Marcus says is true, it's likely that Clarence regularly gossips, shares inappropriate information or talks disrespectfully or maliciously about others.

Reasons for the potential performance problem (the 3Cs):

The 3Cs may all be at play. There may be a lack of communication, a lack of conditions and/or a lack of consequences. Does Clarence have any integrity? It seems that his work ethics aren't in line with the basic, common rules of decency that the rest of us live by. Such behavior suggests a lack of communication about the company's expectations for a respectful workplace.

We also don't know whether Clarence has the conditions to succeed. Does he feel he has the tools and training to be successful? Perhaps he builds himself up by putting others down because he doesn't have confidence in his own abilities. We can also speculate that because Clarence is self-motivated, Deanna doesn't provide feedback or praise (or at least enough of it).

What would you do if you were Deanna?

There really is only one answer here. You need to address the problem. Ignoring the problem will not make it go away, and everything about this case study suggests that this is not new behavior for Clarence.

How you address the problem is another matter. What Marcus told you is hearsay, but what you heard Clarence tell a client is not. We'll discuss hearsay more later.

Summing It Up

- **Helping your employees succeed is what collaborative performance improvement is all about.**
- **Strong leaders coach every day, and sometimes that means challenging an employee to improve.**
- **Helping your employees succeed is different from being responsible for their success.**
- **Any of the 3Cs—lack of communication, conditions or consequences—may be causing or reinforcing a performance problem.**
- **Ignoring a performance problem doesn't make it go away.**
- **Poor performance should never go unnoticed.**

CHAPTER TWO

the painless performance improvement process

Painless performance improvement is that moment in time when an employee decides to improve without any drama, conflict or threats.

It Doesn't Have to Be Painful

Easy for us to say, isn't it? We're not the ones in the hot seat talking about a performance problem. And that's just it—neither you nor your employee should feel as though you are in the hot seat. Granted, performance improvement discussions will never make your list of favorite activities, but trust us: It can be easier than it is now.

The Painless Performance Improvement DVD/Video

If you haven't done so already, watch the DVD/video. Then take a few minutes to complete the true-false activity and answer the discussion questions below. Compare your responses to the answer key on the following page.

Colleague Study Note: If you have watched the DVD/video on your own time, work through the activity and discussion questions together. If you haven't seen the DVD/video yet, watch it together, and work through the activity and discussion questions aloud.

ACTIVITY:

True or False

Answer each question either T for true or F for false. If false, explain why on another piece of paper.

- ___ 1. *Dealing with performance keeps your attitude and your emotions out of the discussion.*
- ___ 2. *Beginning your discussion with a question helps you to quickly get to the root of the problem and shows your employee you're serious.*
- ___ 3. *How you feel about your employee and your employee's performance is an important part of a performance improvement discussion.*
- ___ 4. *Silence is counterproductive because it creates tension and makes you and your employee feel uneasy.*
- ___ 5. *Sidetracks are meant to divert your attention from the real purpose of your discussion.*
- ___ 6. *You can't prepare for sidetracks.*
- ___ 7. *If your employee has a bad attitude, performance will never improve.*
- ___ 8. *You should be prepared to tell your employee what to do to improve performance.*
- ___ 9. *You can help your employees improve but, ultimately, the choice to change is theirs.*
- ___ 10. *The painless performance improvement process helps you keep your conversation on track and focused on performance.*

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

True or False—Answers

- 1. *Dealing with performance keeps your attitude and your emotions out of the discussion. True.*
- 2. *Beginning your discussion with a question helps you to quickly get to the root of the problem and shows your employee you're serious.*

False. Doing so is often accusatory and judgemental and may elicit an emotional reaction from your employee.

3. How you feel about your employee and your employee's performance is an important part of a performance improvement discussion.

False. Letting your emotions and feelings—your attitude—into the discussion creates confrontation and confusion. Attitudinal statements are vague and do nothing to help change behavior.

4. Silence is counterproductive because it creates tension and makes you and your employee feel uneasy.

False. Silence is valuable to a performance improvement discussion because it forces your employee to respond and take responsibility. It may create tension and make you and your employee feel uneasy, but it is critical to the success of any performance improvement discussion.

5. Sidetracks are meant to divert your attention from the real purpose of your discussion.

True.

6. You can't prepare for sidetracks.

False. You should mentally prepare for a sidetrack. Knowing your employees may help you predict what kind of sidetrack they may throw at you. For example, if you have an employee who readily verbalizes frustrations, you can anticipate an angry outburst. To divert your attention from the performance issue, this employee may verbally attack you or a co-worker.

7. If your employee has a bad attitude, performance will never improve.

False. For example, an employee may not offer good customer service to female customers because of his belief that females never tip well. After a performance improvement discussion that deals with his lack of attention and slow service, he may choose to improve and change his behaviors. That doesn't mean his belief that females tip poorly has changed at all.

8. You should be prepared to tell your employee what to do to improve performance.

False. Although you should both agree on a solution, the ideas should come from your employee. However, sometimes an employee won't be able to come up with a realistic solution. For that reason, you should always have a solution in mind and be prepared to prompt and lead your employee to come up with the solution. For

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example, you may think taking a break between writing and proof-reading correspondence would help your assistant avoid the grammatical errors she makes. If she doesn't come up with any solutions, you may prompt her by saying something like, "Do you reread your correspondence immediately after writing it? Do you think your eyes might benefit from taking a break before you proofread your work?"

- 9. You can help your employees improve but, ultimately, the choice to change is theirs. True.**
- 10. The painless performance improvement process helps you keep your conversation on track and focused on performance. True.**

ACTIVITY:

DVD/Video Discussion Questions

- 1. What is the painless performance improvement process?**

Step 1— _____

Step 2— _____

Step 3— _____

Step 4— _____

Step 5— _____

Step 6— _____

- 2. What word helps ensure you are stating what you observed? _____**

- 3. What is the difference between a conflict and an intervention? _____**

4. **What two words help you get back on track after a sidetrack?** _____

5. **What little word helps you avoid another sidetrack and moves you to the solution step?** _____

6. **Why are follow-up and feedback so important?** _____

7. **What should you do if your employee doesn't improve?** _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

DVD/Video Discussion—Answers

1. What is the painless performance improvement process?

Step 1—State What You've Observed.

Step 2—Wait for a Response.

Step 3—Remind Them of The Goal.

Step 4—Ask Them for Their Specific Solution.

Step 5—Agree Together on the Best Solution.

Step 6—Follow Through.

2. What word helps ensure you are stating what you observed? *Noticed.*

3. What is the difference between a conflict and an intervention? *A conflict is emotional and negative. It can be judgemental and can easily*

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escalate without a solution. An intervention is positive. You are confronting the employee and the problem with the intention of agreeing on a solution and moving forward. A conflict has winners and losers. An intervention has outcomes. It is a win-win.

4. What two words help you get back on track after a sidetrack?

Right now.

5. What little word helps you avoid another sidetrack and moves you to the solution step? So.

6. Why are follow-up and feedback so important? *Your employee needs to know that you've noticed a change and that you care. Your follow-up and feedback help your employees know that what they do matters to you.*

7. What should you do if your employee doesn't improve? *Have a second performance improvement discussion, and this time outline the consequences for failure to improve.*

Summing It Up

- **Painless performance improvement is that moment in time when an employee decides to improve without any drama, conflict or threats.**
- **The painless performance improvement process helps you keep your conversation on track and focused on performance.**
- **The painless performance improvement process is comprised of six steps:**

Step 1—State What You've Observed.

Step 2—Wait for a Response.

Step 3—Remind Them of The Goal.

Step 4—Ask Them for Their Specific Solution.

Step 5—Agree Together on the Best Solution.

Step 6—Follow Through.

CHAPTER THREE

dealing with performance, not attitude

People's behaviors—their words and actions—can be seen and discussed. What are they thinking and feeling? Unless they tell you, that's anybody's guess.

Conflict Versus Intervention

Conflict. We've all been there. When the desire to be right consumes all our energy. When words come out of our mouth along with all our emotions. When we square off with our adversary of the moment, determined to prove him wrong because we are right.

Inherent in a conflict is the idea that if I am right, my adversary must be wrong. A conflict has a winner and a loser. It is a battle of attitudes and emotions, which is why a conflict about improving performance rarely ends with any solution. Instead, emotions escalate and a simple performance problem becomes personal and sometimes hurtful.

An intervention, however, has outcomes. It has results. A performance improvement intervention is win-win. It is a collaborative effort to solve a performance problem.

But an intervention can be successful only if you focus on behaviors. If attitudes and emotions get in the way, you're back in the throes of a conflict. And the easiest way to ensure that you are focusing on behaviors is to state

what you've observed, which is the first step of the painless performance improvement process.

STEP 1 State What You've Observed

State what you've observed. Seems simple enough, doesn't it? For many of us, though, doing so can be a little challenging. Why? Because we let our emotions and attitudes get in the way. We can't help it. It's human nature.

Attitude Versus Behavior

Let's define what we mean before we go any further.

ACTIVITY:

Definitions

Take a few minutes to think about the difference between an attitude and a behavior.

What is an attitude? _____

What is a behavior? _____

Can you help change someone's attitude? _____

Can you help change someone's behaviors? _____

Read the following definitions and descriptions to assess your answers.

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Attitude Defined

An attitude is:

How someone feels about something—a value or belief, even that person's disposition and mood. It can be deep-seated and is difficult for someone else to change. And it means something different to everybody. For example:

Jana is just plain lazy. At least that's what her manager, Carrie, believes. It takes Jana twice the time it takes Carrie to do the same task. Carrie figures Jana just doesn't care about her job.

Carrie's attitude about Jana is that she is lazy. Something Jana does triggers a deep-seated idea of what it means to be lazy. And if Carrie lets it, that attitude will drive her behavior toward Jana. Because Carrie thinks of Jana as lazy, maybe Carrie's mentally written Jana off. Or perhaps Carrie gives others on her team the critical tasks.

Let's look at another example:

Carlos has no patience for teenagers. When he was growing up, he and his friends knew their place. They were respectful and courteous. Not kids today. Carlos thinks they're rude. They look out for themselves and nobody else. And they're always in a hurry.

Carlos' attitude about teenagers is that they are disrespectful, rude and selfish. And if he lets it, his attitude will drive his behavior toward all teenagers. His interaction with a teenager may be tinged with contempt. Or maybe he won't even give them the time of day. Perhaps he'll be rude or disrespectful because that's what he expects from them.

In both of the above examples, the people's attitudes are what they are thinking or how they are feeling. It's their belief about something, their

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mind-set. Right or wrong, Carrie believes Jana is lazy. And valid or not, Carlos believes teenagers are disrespectful.

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Behavior Defined

A behavior is:

***Something someone does.** Behaviors are observable and tangible. They are something that two people can look at the same way. It's possible to influence someone to change their behavior.*

Let's look at the above examples again.

Carrie and Jana

Carrie may not be able to stop thinking of Jana as lazy, but Carrie can consider what Jana does that makes her believe that Jana is lazy. Does Jana work too slowly? Does she wait to be told what to do? Does she let others finish her projects? These are the observable behaviors that Carrie can point out when she talks with Jana.

Carlos and the Kids of Today

It would probably take a life-altering event to change the way Carlos thinks about today's teenagers. If he interacts with teenagers as part of his job, a manager won't be able to change Carlos' opinion, his bias, about teens. But a manager can focus on the unacceptable way Carlos is acting toward the teenagers. Telling Carlos he has a bad attitude won't do any good, but focusing on Carlos' behaviors may. A manager can focus on Carlos's short tone of voice with teenagers or the fact that he doesn't smile or greet them.

Attitudes Help Us Make Sense of Our World

The interesting thing about attitudes is that they help us filter and process the information we receive about the world around us. Based on our experiences,

we place values on everything, and that helps us more quickly assess people, situations and information.

Because attitudes represent our thoughts and feelings, we own them. That's why it is nearly impossible to affect change when attitudes get in the way. As managers, we can help employees change their behavior, but it is nearly impossible for us to help them change their attitude (think about Carlos) or help them change their behaviors if our attitudes get in the way (think about Carrie).

Note: Most people have probably also heard the word "attitude" applied to mood. For example, "You had better turn your attitude around." But only the person experiencing the bad mood has the power to change it.

ACTIVITY:

Attitude Assessment

Read the following scenarios and consider how the employee might feel.

1. *You have an employee who is consistently late. You say, "You're late again. Can you try to show me that you care about your job, even if you don't?"*

Speculate on what the employee may be feeling. _____

2. *You have an employee who has made several receiving errors again this week. You say, "This is just plain careless. You need to take your job more seriously."*

Speculate on what the employee may be feeling. _____

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3. You received two complaints that the mail was delivered to the wrong floor again. You say, "If you don't start paying attention to what you are doing, you'll be out a job."

Speculate on what the employee may be feeling. _____

4. There are three tables waiting. Your waiter is chatting with the bartender while he waits for his drink order. You say to him, "We're not paying you to socialize. Can you do your job?"

Speculate on what the employee may be feeling. _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Attitude Assessment—Answers

1. You have an employee who is consistently late. You say, "You're late again. Can you try to show me that you care about your job, even if you don't?"

Speculate on what the employee may be feeling. *Defensive, angry.*

2. You have an employee who has made several receiving errors again this week. You say, "This is just plain careless. You need to take your job more seriously."

Speculate on what the employee may be feeling. *Demoralized, defensive, angry.*

3. You received two complaints that the mail was delivered to the wrong floor again. You say, “If you don’t start paying attention to what you are doing, you’ll be out a job.”

Speculate on what the employee may be feeling. *Hurt, scared, defensive.*

4. There are three tables waiting. Your waiter is chatting with the bartender while he waits for his drink order. You say to him, “We’re not paying you to socialize. Can you do your job?”

Speculate on what the employee may be feeling. *Embarrassed, angry.*

The Neutral “I Noticed” Approach

A nonjudgemental, objective approach to help ensure you are keeping your emotions and attitude out of your discussion is to use the words “I noticed ...” to state what you’ve observed. For example, “Antoine, I noticed that you missed the deadline to get the reports out to the west coast.”

Note: Keep in mind that your employees are people first, workers second. Address them by name and be respectful.

ACTIVITY:

Step 1—State What You’ve Observed

Read the following scenarios and determine what you would say for Step 1 of the painless performance improvement process.

1. **Patient:** “I’m so sorry I am late; I was ...”

Camille (interrupting): “Our policy is 15 minutes. When you’re later than that, you have to reschedule.”

Patient: “But I ...”

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Camille (interrupting again): *“I’m sorry. That’s our policy. You can call to reschedule if you don’t want to do it now.”*

State what you’ve observed to Camille: _____

2. **Gustavo (on the phone with one of the salespeople):** *“I told you I’d get it to you when I’m finished with it ... I know you have a customer waiting for it. For all I care, you can tell your customer to go somewhere else ... I refuse to rush and sacrifice quality just so you can have it today ... Well, regardless of what I told you, it won’t be finished today!”*

State what you’ve observed to Gustavo: _____

3. **Tanya:** *“Your credit card must be bad. I couldn’t get approval. Do you still want your stuff?”*

Customer: *“Not from here, I don’t.”*

Tanya: *“Suit yourself.”*

State what you’ve observed to Tanya: _____

4. You see Jackson hurry in and look around. You look at the clock. Third time late this month.

State what you’ve observed to Jackson: _____

5. You see the delivery truck and a stack of cartons, but you don't see Andy. The driver tells you he's been ringing the bell and waiting almost 15 minutes. You verify and sign for the delivery. In walks Andy.

Andy: "Hey, thanks for handling the delivery for me. I know I'm not supposed to leave the warehouse floor unattended, but I was only gone a minute. Had to use the restroom."

State what you've observed to Andy: _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Step 1—State What You've Observed—Answers

1. **State what you've observed to Camille:** *Camille, I want to talk to you for a moment. I noticed you were a bit rude with that last patient. You interrupted him twice and didn't give him an opportunity to talk.*
2. **State what you've observed to Gustavo:** *Gustavo, I heard you on the phone a moment ago saying you didn't care if our customer went elsewhere for their order.*
3. **State what you've observed to Tanya:** *Tanya, I noticed your customer getting angry when you were talking to him about his credit card.*
4. **State what you've observed to Jackson:** *Jackson, I noticed you coming in almost 10 minutes late this morning.*
5. **State what you've observed to Andy:** *Andy, I heard the bell ring repeatedly. When I came back here, I noticed that nobody was on the warehouse floor. The driver said he had been waiting almost 15 minutes.*

Handling Hearsay

Acting on hearsay is tricky because the inappropriate behavior is something someone else has told you about. It's secondhand information. *You* have not seen the performance problem.

Unless it's an egregious complaint (such as theft or sexual harassment), you should wait to see what else unfolds. You may get information to support or confirm the problem. You may receive additional accounts of hearsay about the same inappropriate behavior, or you may hear from different people about the same problem. Eventually, you'll need to address the issue.

Instead of stating what you've observed, you'll state what someone told you, which gives your employees the opportunity to tell you their side. But at least you've presented the potential problem.

ACTIVITY:

Case Studies—Part 2

Read each case study. Think about what you would say if you were the manager. State what you've observed.

STUDY #1

The Case of the Orderly Associate

SYNOPSIS:

Jason is merchandising the sale table. By midmorning, Kevin notices that Jason is getting noticeably annoyed by customers and overhears him muttering about them. He doesn't say anything to Jason because a customer walks in.

The customer walks by the sale tables and stops. Jason does not look up. Kevin notices the customer looking through the shirts, approaches the customer, says hello, and proceeds to help the customer find a size. Kevin asks Jason to assist the customer at checkout.

If you were Kevin, what would you say to Jason after the customer leaves?

STUDY #2

The Case of the Grumbling Group Leader

SYNOPSIS:

When Sylvia explained that management wants the Hornsby order finished a week earlier, Kim, the group leader, asked why management never asks the employees' opinion. Sylvia said that she's confident everyone can pull together to meet the new deadline. Kim walked off grumbling and referred to the deadline as stupid. Thinking that Kim just needed to blow off some steam, Sylvia didn't say anything to her.

When Sylvia walks into the break room an hour later, she sees Kim talking to James, another employee in Kim's group. Sylvia hears Kim say, "They're always changing the deadlines. Or they make last-minute changes to the design. And they expect us to just do it. Well, I don't see how it's going to happen this time." Upon seeing Sylvia, the conversation ends and both employees leave.

If you were Sylvia, what would you say to Kim? _____

STUDY #3

The Case of the Ambitious Account Rep

SYNOPSIS:

Deanna had always appreciated the self-motivated style of Clarence, an up-and-coming account rep. After learning from Marcus that Clarence has been bad-mouthing her, she happened to hear him on the telephone talking about cleaning up other reps' messes and telling another rep's client to call him directly next time.

That afternoon Shannon, another account rep, comes into Deanna's office visibly upset. She tells Deanna that when she called one of her clients, Liza Armstrong, to follow up on an order, she learned that Clarence had made inappropriate comments about Shannon to Liza.

Because she was surprised that Clarence had been talking with Liza, Shannon said she pressed Liza for details. Liza said that Clarence went out of his way to help so that he could alleviate some of the pressures Shannon was feeling due to the mess her personal life was in.

After learning that Clarence gave his direct phone number to Liza, Shannon went to talk with him. Clarence admitted that he called Liza. He said that he saw the shipping error when he was in the mail room and decided to help. Shannon said she confronted him about telling Liza that her personal life was a mess. Clarence told her, "Well, I had to tell her something. Better she thinks you have some personal problems than that you can't handle your job."

If you were Deanna, what would you say to Clarence? _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Case Studies—State What You’ve Observed

Use the debriefs below as a guide to assess your answers. The exact words are not important. Instead, make sure your responses answer the following questions:

- **Does your answer focus on performance?**
- **Does it describe behaviors (what you saw or heard firsthand)?**
- **Is it neutral and objective (without attitudes or emotions)?**

Colleague Study Note: Compare and discuss each case study. Critique one another’s answers according to the following criteria:

- Does your colleague’s answer focus on performance?
- Does it describe behaviors (what you saw or heard firsthand)?
- Is it neutral and objective (without attitudes or emotions)?

If you were Kevin, what would you say to Jason after the customer leaves? Jason, I noticed you didn’t acknowledge that last customer.

If you were Sylvia, what would you say to Kim? Kim, I noticed you talking with James. I heard you talking about not making the new deadline.

If you were Deanna, what would you say to Clarence? Clarence, I just spoke with Shannon. She told me that you made a few inappropriate comments to Liza Armstrong about her.

Summing It Up

The Process

- Step 1—State What You’ve Observed.
- Step 2—Wait for a Response.
- Step 3—Remind Them of the Goal.
- Step 4—Ask Them for Their Specific Solution.
- Step 5—Agree Together on the Best Solution.
- Step 6—Follow Through.

An Overview

- **An attitude is how someone feels about something.**
- **A behavior is something someone does.**
- **People change their own attitudes.**
- **People can influence others to change their behaviors.**
- **Use the words “I noticed ...” to state what you’ve observed.**
- **A conflict is a battle of attitudes and emotions and has a winner and a loser.**
- **An intervention has outcomes.**

CHAPTER FOUR

discuss the problem

*Listening is a powerful way to
make your employees accountable.*

STEP 2 Wait for a Response

Waiting. Easier said than done. At one time or another, whether it's been at work, a public function or even a party, we've all felt that desperate need to talk to break the silence. We've all felt that compelling feeling to say something, anything, to break the tension.

When an uncomfortable silence creeps into the space between you and your employee, the desire to say something may feel overwhelming. For some, the silence begins to feel like an eternity. And it becomes almost unbearable.

But it is critical that you wait for your employee's response. If you don't, you'll sabotage your efforts at a collaborative performance improvement process. If you speak, the process crumbles. You've inadvertently let your employee off the hook. You've taken on the responsibility for the problem. When you wait and listen, you are making your employees accountable.

ACTIVITY:

The Sounds of Silence

Think of a time when you were in a situation in which the silence made you feel uncomfortable. (For example, asking someone out on a date and waiting for an answer. Or giving a prepared speech and losing your place.)

Describe the situation: _____

How did you feel? _____

Describe the silence and your desire to talk as time wore on. _____

How long did the silence feel as though it lasted? _____

In reality, how long was the silence? _____

Colleague Study Note: Compare your situations and talk about how compelling the need to talk can be in such situations.

The Value of Silence

Silence can be powerful. You may mentally squirm, but don't give in to the desire to fill the void. Let the silence hang in the air. The longer you wait for a response, the more pressure you put on your employee to talk.

Stalling or Thinking?

It's important to note that sometimes the silence creates a palpable tension you both feel. Other times, however, it feels uncomfortable only to you. When you both feel the tension, it's likely because your employee doesn't

want to talk. It's a nonverbal stall that usually turns into a verbal stall (more on that later).

However, some employees may just be thinking of what to say. This is an important distinction, one you can use to your advantage. Instead of focusing on your desperate urge to say something, mentally talk to yourself about giving your employee time to think. When you want to talk to alleviate the silence, think to yourself, "I'm giving my employee time to think. She needs time to think."

What seems like an eternity to you may be only the minute or two that your employee needs to formulate what to say. And when your employee talks, you may:

- **Learn why your employee thinks there is a problem.**
- **Discover that your employee doesn't consider it a problem.**
- **Get denials, excuses or sidetracks.**

Sidetracks

Nobody likes confrontation. And your employee is no exception. Your employee is on the hot seat and may attempt to divert your focus. Anticipate being sidetracked and you'll be prepared.

Keep in mind, though, that as your employee tries to divert your attention, he or she may also be telling you something about the 3Cs. But even if your eyes are opened to a shortcoming you may need to address, it's still up to you to stop the sidetrack and get back to the performance issue.

Five Common Sidetracks

So you're waiting for a response. Waiting. And waiting. Finally your employee talks. But it's not about the performance issue. Instead, 9 out of 10 times, your employee will say something to try to divert your attention. Your employee will try to get you off track.

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Although there are many different types of sidetracks, the most common are these:

- **The Stall** is something the employee says to bide time or, ideally, end the discussion. For example, “You’re right. I’ll try harder next time.” It sounds like agreement but you haven’t talked about a solution yet.
- **The Guilt Trip** is something the employee says that takes advantage of the employee-manager working relationship or the manager’s role as leader. The employee may act hurt, frustrated or upset.

But it’s really a subtle attack to divert your attention from the performance issue. It might sound something like, “I try so hard but it’s never good enough for you.” Or “Why don’t you ever have anything good to say? I’m doing the best I can.” Although you have a legitimate performance issue to talk about, these examples suggest a failing in the 3Cs. Get back on track, but afterward, think about your feedback and praise.

- **The Self-Inflicted Wound** is something the employee says to make the manager feel bad. As a result, the manager may want to soften the message. For example, “Oh, I know I messed up again. I’m so sorry. I can’t seem to get anything right lately. I don’t blame you for being so upset.”
- **The Attack** is an angry onslaught of words directed at you. It may focus on the way you manage or on you personally. For example, “I don’t see you pitching in to help out when we’re short-handed.” Or “I don’t think you should be talking to me about being late. You come in late every Tuesday when you need to drop your daughter off at the sitter’s.”

The Attack is probably the most difficult of the sidetracks to handle because it can elicit a strong emotional response from you. The key to handling this sidetrack is to stay calm. Consider any of the accusations in light of the 3Cs at another time. And if you or your employee needs time to cool off as a result of this sidetrack, allow for the time. But schedule a time to continue your discussion before you temporarily part ways.

- **The Shift** is something the employee says to place blame somewhere else. Usually directed toward a co-worker, another department, or even a policy, the employee tries to avoid responsibility for the problem by placing blame somewhere else. For example, “Why aren’t you talking to Katie about this? I can’t finish on time because she is forever getting me the numbers late.” Or, “Why are you talking to me about this? You should be talking to Tony. He never seems to have enough time to finish what he starts.”

We’ll talk about how to handle sidetracks in **STEP 3**.

Colleague Study Note: It’s human nature to try to sidetrack during a confrontation. Discuss the ways in which you sidetrack when you feel confronted about something. Then think about your employees. Can you or your colleague predict the likelihood of certain sidetracks for any of your employees?

STEP 3 **Remind Them of The Goal**

You’re well into the performance improvement process. Whether your employee has tried to sidetrack you or not, it’s time for you to plainly state the performance goal.

Again, it’s important to speak in behavioral terms. Make sure the performance standard is measurable and observable. But first, let’s look at the process.

The Process So Far

Step 1—State What You’ve Observed.

Step 2—Wait for a Response.

Step 3—Remind Them of The Goal.

Right Now ...

Step 4—Ask Them for Their Specific Solution.

Step 5—Agree Together on the Best Solution.

Step 6—Follow Through.

The “Right Now” Redirect

So you’re waiting for a response. When it comes, listen. Really listen. If you start to feel pulled away from the problem you want to discuss, you’re getting sidetracked. To get back on track, say the two magic words, “right now,” and state the performance goal. The basic idea is to say, “Right now, we’re talking about ...” and then move into Step 3 by reminding the employee of the performance goal.

ACTIVITY:

The “Right Now” Redirect

Read each scenario below. Determine what you would say. Use the “right now” redirect and remind each employee of the goal.

- 1. Paul has been a solid employee for two years. In the last two weeks, however, he has come in late three times. And yesterday he plainly told a customer to leave if he wasn’t happy. When you asked Paul what was going on, he told you he’s having a tough time with his wife. A few minutes ago, you heard him curtly tell a customer that he would answer her question after she waited in line like everyone else. The customer walked out.*

After the last customer was helped, you say to Paul, “I noticed you were short with one of our customers. She was so upset by what you said, she just left.”

Paul says, “Oh, I didn’t realize. I’m sorry. You’re right. It’s just that I’m under so much pressure at home. I told you my wife and I are struggling right now. You’ve been so understanding and I don’t blame you for being upset with me.”

Using the “right now” redirect, stop Paul’s sidetrack and go into Step 3 by reminding Paul of the company’s customer service goal. _____

2. *Knowing that the hotel sets up conference rooms the night before a morning meeting, Randy had confirmed that he would have the room set up for 100 attendees before he left for the night. When you come in this morning, the room is not set up and you have less than an hour before the conference starts. You see Randy hurry in while you are apologizing to the keynote speaker and assuring her the room will be ready before people begin to arrive.*

You solicit help to assemble the tables and chairs. Afterward, you find Randy and say, “You told me last night that the meeting room would be set up before you went home. When I came in this morning, I noticed it wasn’t set up.”

Randy says, “Well, maybe if you had stayed late like the rest of us, you would have known how far behind we were. Why should I stay all night when you go home on time?”

Using the right now redirect, stop Randy’s sidetrack and go into Step 3 by reminding Randy of the company’s conference room goal. _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

The “Right Now” Redirect—Answers

1. **Using the “right now” redirect, stop Paul’s sidetrack and go into Step 3, reminding Paul of the company’s customer service goal.** *“I know you’re going through a difficult time. But right now we are talking about our customer service standards. It is your job to politely acknowledge our customers, answer their questions and treat them like guests.”*
2. **Using the “right now” redirect, stop Randy’s sidetrack and go into Step 3, reminding Randy of the company’s conference room goal.** *“That may be true. But right now we are talking about setting up the conference room. Your job is to make sure the room is set up the evening before a morning meeting.”*

STEP 4 Ask Them for Their Specific Solution

If you solve the problem, it becomes your problem.

It would be so easy if you could tell your employee the answer and be done with it. A magic fix. You’re happy. Your employee is happy. Problem solved. After all, isn’t that what managers do? They make the tough decisions. Put out fires. Solve problems.

Yes—except when it comes to people. Then we’re not talking about managing. We’re talking about leading. Leading your employee to a feasible solution. Leading your employee to success.

To help your employee change behaviors and improve performance, you need to work together. You need to collaborate. When you prepare for the performance improvement discussion, think about possible solutions. But for your employee to succeed, ultimately you need to elicit ideas from him or her

and agree on a solution. Before we talk about asking your employee for a solution, let's look at the process again.

The Process So Far

Step 1—State What You've Observed.

Step 2—Wait for a Response.

Step 3—Remind Them of The Goal.

Right Now ...

Step 4—Ask Them for Their Specific Solution.

So ...

Step 5—Agree on a Solution Together.

Step 6—Follow Through.

The “So” Transition

You've handled a sidetrack and reminded your employee of the performance goal. The last thing you want at this point is to hear another sidetrack. That's where a powerful little two-letter word comes in to help: “so.”

Think of the word “so” as a bridge, a transition from the problem to the solution. The “so” transition leads your employee from the performance goal to problem solving. The “so” transition guides the discussion and averts another sidetrack.

To illustrate how the “so” transition steers your discussion, read both of the scenarios below.

SCENARIO #1

Employee: *“I know I messed up. I'm sorry you didn't have the report for your meeting. I had problems with the software again. I wouldn't blame you if you wanted to fire me.”*

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Manager: *“Right now, we’re talking about having the report on my desk every Friday by noon. I need those numbers for my 1:00 meeting. I use them to support my recommendations for the following week.”*

Employee: *“I know you do. It won’t happen again.”*

SCENARIO #2

Employee: *“I know I messed up. I’m sorry you didn’t have the report for your meeting. I had problems with the software again. I wouldn’t blame you if you wanted to fire me.”*

Manager: *“Right now, we’re talking about having the report on my desk every Friday by noon. I need those numbers for my 1:00 meeting. **So**, what are you going to do differently next week to make sure this doesn’t happen again?”*

Consider how much more powerful the second scenario is. The word “so” quickly moves the discussion into problem solving and helps you stay on track.

What If ...

What if your employee has no ideas? Or what if your employee’s ideas are unrealistic? Be careful here. Sometimes employees try to sidestep the issue or put accountability for the problem back onto you. They say they don’t have any ideas or they come up with something downright ludicrous. It may be another sidetrack—a stall, for example, or a means to get an emotional reaction from you. Go through the following activity and consider what might happen when the manager takes responsibility for the solution.

ACTIVITY:

Problem Solved?

Consider the following scenarios. Determine what the employee might be thinking.

SCENARIO #1

Employee is late due to traffic.

What the manager says

"I noticed you came in late again today. I'd like you to start leaving your house earlier so that you'll miss rush hour traffic. That way, I'll see you bright and early in the morning. OK?"

What the employee says

"OK, I'll try."

What the manager doesn't know

Employee has to get his children on the bus for school before he leaves. Sometimes it takes him longer to get his children ready in the morning. Other days, the bus is late. Either way, there will be days when he can't leave his house any earlier and then, he will be late.

What might the employee be thinking? _____

Who has taken ownership of the problem? _____

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SCENARIO #2

As customers drive up to the window, the employee doesn't greet them or suggest add-ons after they order.

What the manager says

"I noticed you finished the last few sales without greeting or suggesting any add-ons. I know there's a lot more to remember at the drive-thru, so I wrote our customer process on a card that you can put near the register."

What the employee says

"OK, thanks. I'll try to remember."

What the manager doesn't know

She hates the drive-thru. The cold weather. Customers in a rush. She would rather move back to the front counter and see customers face to face, even though, according to her manager, her multitasking abilities are better utilized at the drive-thru window.

What might the employee be thinking? _____

Who has taken ownership of the problem? _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Problem Solved?—Answers

SCENARIO #1

What might the employee be thinking? *“That’s what I do now. But not every morning runs smoothly enough for me to leave early.”*

Who has taken ownership of the problem? *The manager.*

SCENARIO #2

What might the employee be thinking? *“I just want to get back to the front counter.”*

Who has taken ownership of the problem? *The manager.*

Prompt for Solutions

Instead of providing the solution, encourage your employee with questions about potential solutions. For example, if you’re thinking a possible solution for tardiness might be getting up earlier, ask questions such as these:

- **What time do you get up in the morning?**
- **How much time do you give yourself?**

The key is to make sure your employee says the words. If you say it, it becomes something somebody else said. If your employee says it, it becomes real.

Colleague Study Note: Talk about a time when you’ve had a problem that affects you and others. How did you try to solve the problem? What did you do to get buy-in? Consider performance problems you’ve had to deal with, a problem with a school project, or a problem you’re focusing on with children. Why is it easier to get everyone on board when they are part of the solution process?

ACTIVITY:

Prompting for Solutions

Read each scenario below and list two or three questions that could help lead the employee to the desired solution.

1. **Problem:** Late for meetings and appointments.
Possible solution: Use an electronic planner to keep track of appointments and times.

2. **Problem:** Doesn't tell the customer about any of the promotions.
Possible solution: Create a reminder card with two promotions the employee really likes.

3. **Problem:** Patient folders aren't being returned to the files each day.
Possible solution: Set aside two or three times a day to return folders.

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Prompting for Solutions—Answers

- Problem:** Late for meetings and appointments.
Possible solution: Use an electronic planner to keep track of appointments and times.

How do you currently keep track of your appointments and meetings?

How is that system working for you?

Can you think of another system that might make it easier for you to stay on top of your appointments?
- Problem:** Doesn't tell the customer about any of the promotions.
Possible solution: Create a reminder card with two promotions the employee really likes.

Have you ever looked at the promotions and thought about which ones you really like?

If you picked one or two promotions each week that you really like, do you think it would be easier to tell the customer about them?

What can you do to help you remember to tell your customers about your favorite promotions?
- Problem:** Patient folders aren't being returned to the files each day.
Possible solution: Set aside two or three times a day to return folders.

How do you feel when you see a pile of folders stacked at your work area at the end of the day and again in the morning?

Do you think it would be easier to deal with the folders if the stack wasn't so overwhelming to look at each night?

How can you break the task into more manageable chunks?

ACTIVITY:

Case Studies—Part 3

Read the case studies below and consider how you would apply Steps 2–4 of the painless performance improvement process. But first, let’s look at the process so far:

Step 1—State What You’ve Observed.

Step 2—Wait for a Response.

Step 3—Remind Them of The Goal.

Right Now ...

Step 4—Ask Them for Their Specific Solution.

So ...

If necessary, prompt for a solution.

Step 5—Agree Together on the Best Solution.

Step 6—Follow Through.

STUDY #1

The Case of the Orderly Associate

SYNOPSIS:

Jason is merchandising the sale table and is noticeably annoyed by customer interruptions.

Kevin steps in to help a customer, while Jason continues to fold and straighten.

After the customer leaves, Kevin approaches Jason and says, “Jason, I noticed you didn’t acknowledge that last customer.” Jason looks up and says, “Oh ... I’m sorry. I’ll try to make sure I do that next time.”

If you were Kevin, what would you say next? _____

STUDY #2

The Case of the Grumbling Group Leader

SYNOPSIS:

Sylvia moves the deadline for the Hornsby order up a week. Kim, the group leader, is visibly upset and refers to the deadline as stupid. In the break room, Sylvia overhears Kim talking to James about constant deadline and design changes and how they'll never make the new Hornsby deadline.

Sylvia finds Kim on the floor and asks to speak with her for a couple of minutes. Sylvia says, "Kim, I noticed you talking with James. I heard you talking about missing the new deadline."

Kim says, "Well, it's no secret we won't make it. I told you that myself at this morning's meeting, but you obviously weren't listening. If you got out of your office once in awhile and spent more time out on the floor with us, you'd see what was really happening around here."

If you were Sylvia, what would you say next? _____

STUDY #3

The Case of the Ambitious Account Rep

SYNOPSIS:

Soon after Deanna learns that Clarence has been badmouthing her, she overhears him on the telephone telling another rep’s client to call him directly next time.

That afternoon Shannon, another account rep, tells Deanna that Clarence told one of her clients, Liza Armstrong, that Shannon was feeling overwhelmed due to the mess her personal life was in. Shannon tells Deanna that she confronted Clarence who admitted calling and talking to Liza.

Deanna goes to see Clarence and says, “I just spoke with Shannon. She told me that you made a few inappropriate comments to Liza Armstrong about her.” Deanna waits for a response.

Finally Clarence says, “Why are you coming after me? Shannon is the one you should be talking to. She’s the one who made a mess of the shipment, one of many mistakes I’ve handled lately.”

If you were Deanna, what would you say next? _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:**Case Studies**

Use the following debriefs as a guide to assess your answers. The exact words are not important.

Colleague Study Note: Compare and discuss each case study. Critique one another's answers according to the following criteria:

- Does your colleague's answer redirect to get back on track?
- Does your colleague's answer remind the employee of a performance goal that is observable and measurable?
- Does your colleague's answer transition using the word "so" to move into problem solving?
- Does your colleague's answer ask for a specific solution?
- Is your colleague's answer neutral and objective?

If you were Kevin, what would you say next? *"OK, good. But right now I want to talk about our customer service standards. It is your job to acknowledge every customer by stopping what you are doing, smiling, saying hello and asking to help. So, what specifically are you going to do to make sure the sale tables don't interfere with helping our customers?"*

If you were Sylvia, what would you say next? *"We're not talking about my management style, Kim. Right now, we are talking about your job as group leader and how you will encourage your group and get them to pull together to meet the new deadline, instead of verbally rallying your team to be unsuccessful. So, what specifically are you going to do to try to help your team meet the deadline?"*

If you were Deanna, what would you say next? *"Clarence, right now we are talking about you. When you talk to anyone inside or outside of this office, I expect your comments about anyone on our team to be positive and professional. As for our accounts, all reps are responsible for their own. Shannon needs to be the client's contact, not you. So, what specifically are you going to do to make sure something like this doesn't happen again?"*

Summing It Up

The Process

- Step 1—State What You’ve Observed.
- Step 2—Wait for a Response.
- Step 3—Remind Them of The Goal.
- Step 4—Ask Them for Their Specific Solution.
- Step 5—Agree Together on the Best Solution.
- Step 6—Follow Through.

An Overview

- **When you wait and listen, you are making your employees accountable.**
- **The longer you wait for a response, the more pressure you put on your employee to talk.**
- **To get back on track, say the two magic words “right now” and remind your employee of the goal (Step 3).**
- **When you state the performance goal, make sure the standard is measurable and observable.**
- **The word “so” quickly moves the discussion into problem solving and helps you stay on track.**
- **For your employees to succeed, you need to elicit ideas from them and agree together on a solution.**
- **If you say it, it becomes something somebody else said. If your employee says it, it becomes real.**

CHAPTER FIVE

collaborating on a solution

Real change comes from the person doing the changing.

STEP 5 Agree Together on the Best Solution

This goes back to making sure that the responsibility for change rests with your employee and not you. You can assure your employee of your support, express confidence and promise to follow up. But other than that, it's up to the employee.

Summarizing Your Expectations

If you have asked for a specific solution and your employee has come up with one, summarize your expectations based on the employee's solution, and ask your employee to agree. That is the only way you ensure that you are agreeing together.

As a process, it looks like this:

Step 4—Ask Them for Their Specific Solution.

So ...

If necessary, prompt for a solution.

Employee comes up with a solution.

Step 5—Agree Together on the Best Solution.

Summarize your expectations.

Mutually agree.

Express confidence.

PAINLESS PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Summarizing expectations and asking for agreement does two things:

- **Confirms understanding. By repeating in your own words the solution your employee came up with, you can be sure that both of you understand the expectation and commitment.**
- **Elicits a formal commitment to agree. It creates an environment in which your employee has to commit aloud to what you've agreed upon.**

For example, “To help you arrive on time, you’re going to get up a half hour earlier so you can leave earlier and miss rush hour traffic. That should put you here before 8:30. Do we agree on this?”

Expressing Confidence

Expressing confidence and encouraging your employee are important ways to end your discussion. Although it's not the end of the painless performance improvement process, it closes your initial discussion and does so by building your employee up. Consider the difference between the following:

“OK, Andrea. I’ll see you tomorrow at 8:30 as we agreed.”

“Andrea, I am confident you’ll be able to make the changes we talked about so that you can be here on time every day. I’ll see you tomorrow morning at 8:30.”

ACTIVITY:

Case Studies—Part 4

Read each of the case studies. Think about how you would apply Step 5—Agree Together on the Best Solution. Be sure to summarize your expectations, ask for agreement, and express confidence.

STUDY #1

The Case of the Orderly Associate

SYNOPSIS:

Jason is merchandising the sale table and is noticeably annoyed by customer interruptions. When Kevin addresses the problem, Jason tries to sidetrack by stalling the conversation. He apologizes and says he'll handle it better next time.

Kevin said, "OK, good. But right now I want to talk about our customer service standards. Acknowledging a customer means stopping whatever we are doing, smiling, saying hello and asking to help. So, what specifically are you going to do to make sure the sale tables don't interfere with helping our customers?"

Jason thinks for a moment and says, "I guess I could stop what I'm doing and come back to it afterward. Or I could tell them that I'll be with them in just a moment."

If you were Kevin, what would you say next? _____

STUDY #2

The Case of the Grumbling Group Leader

SYNOPSIS:

Sylvia moves the deadline for the Hornsby order up a week. Kim, the group leader, is visibly upset and refers to the deadline as stupid. In the breakroom, Sylvia overhears Kim talking to James about constant deadline and design changes and how they'll never make the new Hornsby deadline.

When Sylvia talks to Kim about her conversation with James and her comments that they won't make the new deadline, Kim tries to sidetrack by going on the attack.

"We're not talking about my management style, Kim," Sylvia said. "Right now, we are talking about my expectation that you encourage your group and pull together to meet the new deadline, instead of verbally rallying your team to be unsuccessful. So, what specifically are you going to do to try to help your team meet the deadline?"

Kim: "We could hold a pep rally. Or pull together a contest. Don't you think if I knew how to meet the deadline, I'd make sure we did?"

Sylvia: "You've been telling everyone it's an impossible deadline. So what can you do at this point to tell them something different?"

Kim: "It is an impossible deadline."

Sylvia: "You've made tighter deadlines."

Kim: "Not with only two lines running. You've devoted the third line to the Andersen order."

Sylvia: "Well, that's true. Are you telling me that we can't make the deadline with only two lines?"

Kim: "There's no way."

Sylvia: "Well, let me think about how we can get that third line back to you. But right now we're talking about the example you set for your group as their group leader. Your team has listened to you say the deadline is impossible. So what are you going to do to get your team on board?"

Kim: "I guess I can get them together and tell them I believe we can do it. I'll tell them you and I are working on how to make it happen."

If you were Sylvia, what would you say next?

STUDY #3

The Case of the Ambitious Account Rep

SYNOPSIS:

Soon after Deanna learns that Clarence has been bad-mouthing her, she overhears him on the telephone talking inappropriately to another rep's client. That afternoon Shannon, another account rep, tells Deanna that Clarence told one of her clients, Liza Armstrong, that Shannon was feeling overwhelmed due to the mess her personal life was in. Shannon said she confronted Clarence who admitted calling and talking to Liza.

Deanna talked with Clarence, who tries to sidetrack by shifting blame to Shannon.

Deanna: "Clarence, right now we are talking about you. When you talk to anyone inside or outside of this office, I expect your comments about anyone on our team to be positive and professional. As for our accounts, all reps

PAINLESS PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

are responsible for their own. Shannon needs to be Liza's contact, not you. So, what specifically are you going to do to make sure something like this doesn't happen again?"

Clarence: "Shannon should be thanking me. What was I supposed to say? She can't handle her own accounts? She's careless? Shipping details aren't her strength? Come on, Deanna, we both know Shannon's not one of your strongest reps."

Deanna: "Right now, Clarence, we are talking about you. So what specifically are you going to do to stay focused on your own accounts and what are you going to do to avoid bad-mouthing other members of our team?"

Clarence: "Well, I guess I can talk to the other rep when I discover a problem instead of calling the client."

Deanna: "And, what are you going to do to avoid bad-mouthing other members of our team?"

Clarence: "I guess I can try to focus on my own work and not talk about the other reps or what they are or are not doing."

If you were Deanna, what would you say next? _____

ACTIVITY DEBRIEF:

Case Studies

Use the debriefs below as a guide to assess your answers. The exact words are not important.

Colleague Study Note: Compare and discuss each case study. Critique one another's answers according to the following criteria:

- Does your colleague's answer summarize expectations?
- Does your colleague's answer get agreement?
- Does your colleague's answer express confidence?

If you were Kevin, what would you say next? *"OK, great. You're going to stop whatever it is that you are doing and take care of the customer. And if you need a moment, you'll acknowledge the customer and say you'll be with them in a minute. Do we agree on this? Jason, you're an important part of our team, and I am confident you'll focus on the needs of our customers from now on."*

If you were Sylvia, what would you say next? *"Good. You're going to meet with your group and tell them we have been talking about the deadline and how to make it work. You'll also tell them that now you believe you can hit the deadline if you all pull together. Is that what we agreed? Thanks, Kim. I am confident you'll be able to set a positive example for your group and that we'll hit this deadline. I'll talk to you more about the third line later today."*

If you were Deanna, what would you say next? *"OK, Clarence. Good. Now, I can count on you to focus on your own work and not talk about other reps or their work and what they are or are not doing, right? And if you discover a problem, you'll talk to the other rep instead of handling it. Do we agree on this? Great. Clarence, you are a strong account rep and I know you will be successful if you stop talking about other members of our team and interfering with their accounts."*

Summing It Up

The Process

- Step 1—State What You’ve Observed.
- Step 2—Wait for a Response.
- Step 3—Remind Them of The Goal.
- Step 4—Ask Them for Their Specific Solution.
- Step 5—Agree Together on the Best Solution.
 - Summarize your expectations.
 - Mutually agree.
 - Express confidence.
- Step 6—Follow Through.

An Overview

- **Make sure that the responsibility for change rests with your employee and not you.**
- **Assure your employee of your support, express confidence and promise to follow up.**
- **Expressing confidence and encouraging your employee are important ways to end your initial discussion while building up your employee.**

what if...

*Follow-through is not about checking up on your employee.
It's about encouragement and support.*

STEP 6 Follow Through

Follow-through is as important as the painless performance improvement process itself. Maybe more so. Without it, you're saying that you don't really care. You're saying that your performance improvement discussion was just talk.

Support and Encouragement for Progress

Follow-through is how you help your employees succeed. With support and encouragement, you're there to celebrate progress, redirect behaviors and show your employees that you care about how they are doing.

There are two performance outcomes that require your support and encouragement:

- **Your employee isn't meeting the standard to which you both agreed but has made progress.** If your employee meets the performance standard you both agreed on, recognize the effort and express confidence. Even if your employee makes only a little progress toward the performance goal, your encouragement of continued improvement might help the employee fully succeed.
- **Your employee did as promised and fully met the performance goal.** Employees repeat behaviors for which they receive positive consequences. Make sure you offer positive consequences. Your employee needs to know that you noticed and that you care.

Failure to Improve

Unfortunately, not every outcome is positive. Not every employee will improve. Maybe the job isn't right for that person. Or maybe the employee just doesn't want to improve.

Most companies have a discipline policy, which gives employees plenty of opportunity to improve performance. Companies usually provide employees a verbal warning and one to two written warnings prior to termination (except for severe offenses, such as theft, which require immediate termination).

If you've gone through the painless performance improvement process and, as you follow through, you find that your employee's performance hasn't changed or hasn't improved enough, it's time to talk about consequences.

Consequences for Failure to Improve

*Termination for poor performance
should never be a surprise.*

If your employee isn't improving, you need to address it. It's no fun to fire someone, but if you don't do anything, your team will suffer. For example:

- **The standards you set may begin to erode.**
- **Your employees may not take your decisions (or you) seriously.**
- **Your employees (and boss) may question your ability to lead.**

If your employee's performance doesn't improve, you need to go through the process again a second time (and, if necessary, a third time). The painless performance improvement process fits well with most progressive discipline policies. As part of the process that leads to termination, you'll need to document the problem, potential solutions and the outcomes. You'll also need to include an explanation of consequences as part of Step 5.

The painless improvement process allows your employee to take responsibility to improve. Because you've been working with your employee, if there isn't improvement, your employee will not be surprised by termination.

Termination

Like a performance improvement discussion, firing an employee should be objective and nonjudgmental. It should focus on the desired performance goal, failure to improve to meet that goal and the resulting consequences—termination.

For example:

State the problem. *“Anna, we agreed you would keep empty tables clear and clean during the lunch hour rush. Today, I noticed that there were customers waiting to be seated because four empty tables weren't cleared or cleaned yet.”*

State the details of the agreement. *“This is the third time we've talked about this. You agreed to go out on the floor every five minutes between noon and one to make sure you're keeping up with the turnover of tables.”*

State the failure to improve and decision to terminate. *“Since that hasn't happened, I have to let you go.”*

Express your support. *“I am sure you'll be successful in some other job and I wish you the best.”*

Summing It Up

The Process

- Step 1—State What You’ve Observed.
- Step 2—Wait for a Response.
- Step 3—Remind Them of The Goal.
- Step 4—Ask Them for Their Specific Solution.
- Step 5—Agree on a Solution Together.
- Step 6—Follow Through.

Offer support and encouragement for improvement and progress.

Go through the process again, document it and outline consequences for failure to improve.

An Overview

- **Follow-through is as important as the performance improvement process itself.**
- **With support and encouragement, you’re there to celebrate progress, redirect behaviors and show your employees that you care about how they are doing.**
- **If you need to go through the process again a second time (and, if necessary, a third time), document it and include an explanation of consequences as part of Step 5.**
- **If you need to terminate an employee for poor performance, it should never be a surprise.**

CHAPTER SEVEN

putting it all together

Although the painless performance improvement process takes fewer than five minutes to go through, it's critical that you are mentally prepared to talk with your employee. The following tools will help you get ready.

Painless Performance Improvement Basics

The Painless Performance Improvement Basics are simple coaching tips you can use to improve your coaching moments. A periodic review of these basic rules of good coaching will help keep you focused on painless performance improvement.

The Six-Step Prep

The Six-Step Prep is a helpful worksheet that will guide you through each step of the painless performance improvement process to help ensure that your discussion is as painless as possible.

As a final activity make a copy of the reproducible worksheet contained in this section. Take a few minutes to work through a potential problem on your team. If you aren't currently dealing with any performance issues, use one of the case studies in this workbook or create a problem to use for this activity.

The 3Cs Checklist

The 3Cs Checklist is a beneficial checklist that will help you prepare for performance discussions by focusing on potential reasons for your employee's poor performance. It may also prepare you for sidetracks or give you a

greater understanding of how your employees may view their work environment. Reproducible worksheets are included in this section of the workbook.

Painless Performance Improvement Basics

Practice these simple coaching tips and you will be on your way to painless performance improvement.

- **Keep it private.** Lambasting your employee in front of others is embarrassing for both of you. It's tough enough to be confronted one-on-one. Imagine how you would feel if someone shared your shortcomings in front of your colleagues.
- **Acknowledge poor performance.** The sooner you address the problem, the sooner you can resolve it. Besides, the rest of your staff is waiting to see what you're going to do. That doesn't mean that you should pounce on your employee as soon as you see a problem. Nor does it mean that you should wait until you get around to it. If you wait until next week to talk about a rude comment your receptionist just made to a patient, for example, the problem doesn't seem so important anymore.
- **Prepare for your meeting.** Reacting to poor performance is counterproductive. To keep your reaction, attitude and emotions out of your discussion, take a few minutes to think about your approach. Think about what you want to say. Use the Six-Step Prep and 3Cs Checklist.
- **Don't look for problems.** Does this issue really require a performance improvement discussion, or does your employee just need a little attention? There is a difference between being habitually late, for example, and arriving late for the second time in the past year. Or consider the difference between an employee who struggles with your customer service expectations and one who has been curt this morning but usually offers outstanding service.

Maybe all you need to do is talk to your employee.

"Monica, today is the second day this week you've arrived late. You've never been late before. What's going on?"

“John, I’ve noticed you’ve been curt with a couple of customers this morning. That is so unlike you. What’s going on?”

- **Use your employee’s name.** Doing so helps keep your employee focused on your words. It also sends the message that you care about your employee as a person.
- **Focus on the behavior you want the employee to continue.** Remind your employee of the goal and praise his or her efforts. Keep in mind that people do what they do because of the consequences of their actions. For example, if you praise and recognize an employee for his smile and sincere greeting, you can be confident he will continue to greet customers that way. Likewise, if you focus your attention and praise on how nice the store looks and never mention customer interactions, your employee may slowly shift his attention away from service and focus more on store appearance.
- **Follow through.** Make it a point to catch your employee improving. Offer praise and encouragement. Your employee wants to know if you’re watching and noticing. If you don’t say anything, your employee may assume it wasn’t that important to you after all.
- **Clearly outline consequences for lack of improvement.** If a second performance improvement discussion is necessary, document it and clearly detail the consequences of continued poor performance, including termination. Be objective and nonjudgemental. State the problem, agreed-upon solution and failure to improve. Termination should never be a surprise.
- **Always treat your employees with respect.** We all deserve it. Make sure you use your employee’s name, talk about performance in private, and don’t talk with other members of your team about the employee or the performance issue. Chances are, they’re aware of what’s going on anyway.
- **Separate the behavior from the employee.** Focus on performance and not the person. There are plenty of good human beings who didn’t succeed at a certain task or job. Poor performance is about what the person does, not who the person is.

The Six-Step Prep

Employee Name: _____ Date: _____

Part I—to be completed prior to meeting with your employee.

Check your attitudes and emotions.

When you think about this performance problem, how is your mood? (angry, frustrated, disgusted, tired, sarcastic, etc.) _____

Do you have any preconceived attitudes about this employee? _____

Have you written off this employee? _____

Do negative attitudes come to mind? (lazy, doesn't care, not worth the trouble, has a bad attitude, etc.) _____

Do you have biases that may affect your judgement about this employee?

Is the performance problem important? Are you willing to terminate this employee if there is a failure to improve in this area? _____

Are you ready to let go of your attitudes and emotions about this employee?

Are you ready to let go of your attitudes and emotions about the performance issue? _____

If yes, continue. If no, take a break and come back when you're ready.

Identify the problem and describe the expected performance standard.

What is the problem? _____

What is the performance goal? _____

Are the problem and performance goal, as written, observable and measurable? _____

If yes, continue. If no, rewrite them.

Prepare for your discussion.

State What You've Observed (Step 1). [Write here what you'd like to say.]
"I noticed ..." _____

Anticipate sidetracks. Will this employee try to divert your attention from the issue? _____

Wait for a Response (Step 2) and **Remind Them of The Goal** (Step 3).
[Write here what you'd like to say.] "Right now ..." _____

Prepare for problem solving.

What are your solutions? _____

What questions can you ask to help your employee come up with a solution?

Ask Them for Their Specific Solution (Step 4). [Write here what you'd like to say.] "So ..."

Part II—to be completed after meeting with your employee.

Agree Together on the Best Solution (Step 5). What is the solution to which you and your employee agreed? _____

Follow Through (Step 6). Date of follow up: _____

Was the performance goal achieved? _____

Describe the improvement. _____

Is there a need for another performance improvement discussion? _____

Is there a need to begin progressive discipline? _____

The 3Cs Checklist

Employee Name: _____ Date: _____

Communication

YES NO

This employee **always** knows what is expected of him/her. _____

I communicate through staff meetings, announcements and one-on-ones. _____

This employee **never** receives directions through word of mouth. _____

I **regularly** offer feedback. _____

My actions **always** reinforce the company's priorities and values. _____

I am the **only** leader from whom this employee gets direction and guidance. _____

I **never** address performance problems in a group setting. _____

Conditions

YES NO

This employee has enough time to succeed. _____

This employee has the tools to succeed. _____

This employee has **all** the training he/she needs to succeed. _____

PAINLESS PERFORMANCE IMPROVEMENT

Consequences	YES	NO
This employee knows that what he/she does matters to me.	___	___
I regularly offer this employee encouragement for good work.	___	___
I regularly offer this employee praise and recognition for good work.	___	___
I never let poor performance or poor work habits go unnoticed.	___	___
When necessary, I challenge this employee to improve his/her performance.	___	___
I clearly communicate the consequences for failure to improve.	___	___
I have not provided this employee negative consequences for good performance (for example, giving tough or undesirable tasks to good performers).	___	___
I have not provided this employee positive consequences for poor performance (for example, giving a tough or undesirable task to someone else).	___	___