

**DEVELOPING INDIVIDUALS, ORGANIZATIONS
AND SYSTEMS
THROUGH PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT:
KEY TO SUCCESS IN THE NEW MILLENNIUM**

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The New Millennium: Change and Information

As we move into the new millennium, we are witnessing dramatic increases in the cost of labor while simultaneously being confronted with a workforce that is woefully unprepared for the ever increasing complexity of the new world of work. With the non-stop avalanche of information and the continuously advancing technology for instantaneous dissemination of that information, the rate of change is accelerating while cycle and lead times decrease. Rather than waiting days or weeks for information to arrive, it attacks us electronically demanding a response at what sometimes seems like blinding speed. As Ryback (*Putting Emotional Intelligence to Work: Successful Leadership is More than IQ*, Butterworth-Heinemann, Woburn, Massachusetts:1998) points out "In the past, decision points could be measured in months, if not in years. Nowadays, they're measured in weeks, if not in days." And in some sectors, we have already reached decision points measured in hours or minutes.

Others have described this period of emergence into the new millennium as "permanent white water", "an information explosion", "a rapid fire world of global competition", and "the eye of a cyclone". In such an environment the ability to quickly and effectively modify behavior based on feedback and situational demands is critical for effectiveness. This is indeed the essence of learning - at the individual, the organizational and the system levels. And, in the new millennium it may well be a critical variable that distinguishes between success and failure.

21st Century Success Requires Learning, Unlearning and Relearning

Futurist Alvin Toffler said "The illiterate of the 21st century will not be those who can not read or write but those who can not learn, unlearn and relearn". In a multi-national environment, such issues of learning, unlearning and relearning may surface as often as one travels from one company office to another or meets colleagues, customers or clients from other countries or backgrounds. To use a fairly simple example of the need for rapid adaptation in something as simple as greeting people: in one day you could be shaking hands greeting an American, greeting a Paraguayan with an embrace, greeting a Japanese colleague with a bow, kissing a Belgian client on the cheek 3 times, and saying Shalom to an Israeli. In each situation, performing the effective behavior required dropping an old behavior and performing a new one.

In a high tech information economy, there is a great need for skilled workers who are willing to stay with the company and to continue to learn, unlearn and relearn

in order to remain state of the art or even to keep pace with whatever industry they are in. Like other countries, the American economy is in need of highly skilled workers. Yet many of those looking for jobs do not have the requisite skills. American corporations have found that many college graduates simply do not have the basic skills for the jobs being offered. Competition for the best and the brightest is keen. To compound the problem, loyalty (both from company to employee and vice versa) has become an endangered species, if not totally extinct. As a result companies that invest huge amounts of money and resources to train workers, not infrequently find they have trained them to move on to bigger jobs and better salaries at other organizations. And workers who have devoted many years to a company may suddenly find themselves laid off when the company decides to downsize.

Study after study has shown that many of the key organizational characteristics that engender employee support, productivity, retention and loyalty are those that promote individual as well as organizational growth and development. (Becoming a 'Worthy Organization': Attracting and Retaining the Workforce Needed for the 21st Century by Miller, F.A., Katz, J. and Gans, R. OD Practitioner, Vol. 30 No. 3, 1998). Yet, despite this, while American businesses spend a great deal of money on training, for the most part, our organizations do not do an effective job of optimizing their human capital. One of the major reasons for this is that individuals, organizations and systems are frequently not managed in a way that leads to a continuous cycle of growth and development. Training is often not targeted to systematically identified individual or even organizational needs and feedback, if given at all, is not done in a way that encourages appropriate modification of behavior.

It is difficult to imagine how individuals, organizations or systems could successfully negotiate the challenging cycle of learning, unlearning and relearning absent feedback. Would you trust the pilot of the plane carrying your entire family, if his/her training had been limited to reading a book about how to fly a plane? The book knowledge might be there but the invaluable learning and judgement that comes from doing and receiving feedback would be missing. Would you choose to entrust your entire family to a plane that had no navigational feedback instruments? Clearly, the ability to reach a goal, requires, among other things, clear and consistent feedback.

The increasing use of electronic communication has not only *not* decreased the need for feedback but it has made it more important than ever. While electronic communication may be rapid and may seem much more efficient, when offices, companies and individuals communicate electronically (and by this I mean primarily e-mail), something is always missing – affect. An electronic communication that is absent voice and body language cues is simply not a substitute for being there. And even if you are using voice mail and videoconferencing, employee satisfaction and the quality of worklife are too easy to mask from a distance. Numerous studies have shown that organizations with high employee satisfaction and high quality of life outperform those where employees are unhappy. Relationships are often a large

component of quality of worklife but as workers become more physically remote from one another and are tied together only through technology, building and maintaining quality relationships becomes more difficult.

What's Wrong with Performance Appraisal?

In some industries feedback to the worker is relatively quick. A waiter in a restaurant gets a good tip or a bad tip. A performer gets a standing ovation or polite brief, unenthusiastic applause. A person hired to make telephone sales either makes her daily quota or doesn't. However, in all these cases while feedback was present, it may not have been useful because it wasn't focused and therefore could not suggest the direction if change in behavior. That is it said "you did well" or "You did poorly" but did not tell the worker what part of the behavior was desirable and what was not or why.

In addition to the worker, the organization needs feedback in order to grow, develop and manage its people well. For example, if the restaurant owner did not receive complaints, she might not know she had a poor waiter who was getting bad tips. If the owner did know, then perhaps the waiter could be trained and developed so as to create a success story rather than a cycle of repeated, demoralizing failures.

Many people equate feedback with performance appraisal. There has been much debate in the literature on the relative merits of performance appraisal. Deming lists "evaluation of performance, merit rating, and annual review" as one of his "Seven Deadly Sins." Unfortunately, many of those who attempt to provide feedback do so in the format of an annual performance appraisal rather than as an ongoing developmental tool. In most work environments, feedback to workers, supervisors, CEO's or the organization itself is neither immediate nor constructive. The lack of a good feedback system makes it much more difficult to optimize performance and productivity. Generally, traditional performance appraisal has not been done in a way that has been optimally helpful.

Some of the arguments against traditional performance appraisal (and some of the reasons performance appraisal systems fail) are:

- a) If financial rewards are related to the evaluation, dishonesty and game playing can be expected
- b) Performance appraisal, as traditionally used, encourages people to use the system rather than to work with it or try to improve it or themselves
- c) Performance appraisal is often a one-time event with little or no follow-up therefore resulting in little or no positive change
- d) When multiple evaluators evaluate different people it is very difficult to ensure they are using the same standards thereby creating inequities and inconsistencies. This can make those being evaluated feel resentful.
- e) By itself, performance appraisal is a tool that looks backwards rather than forward. Therefore it may not address ways of improving behavior but rather may focus on the negatives of behavior without helping people to move toward positive behavior.

- f) Lack of training of those doing the evaluation may lead to inaccurate evaluations delivered in an insensitive manner. Inaccurate evaluations are obviously not helpful and insensitively handled evaluations may hurt or anger people causing them to negate the potentially useful feedback. It could also cause them to quit, to engage in behavior designed to sabotage the supervisor or the organization, or (in the U.S. at least) to file a law suit.
- g) The system is perceived as punitive rather than as growth enhancing.
- h) The system is perceived as unfair since what is evaluated is not related to necessary critical skills for the job or to the expressed values of the organization.

It is therefore little wonder that performance appraisal is one of those things that many employees, supervisors and organizations avoid! On those occasions and in those places where it is used, its inappropriate use often has the opposite effect for which it was designed. That is, rather than motivate people and encourage positive, productive behavior, poorly conceived or executed performance appraisal systems often demoralize and de-motivate.

In organizations where there is not a systematic, constructive approach to the management of performance, it is not unusual for supervisors to be found artificially inflating performance appraisal scores. Some of the reasons for this are:

- a) Untrained supervisors often would rather avoid conflict than deal with it.
- b) Empathy/Sympathy for employee's personal problems
- c) To promote a poor employee up & out - that is, they hope a really good evaluation may result in a promotion causing the employee to no longer work in that department and freeing the supervisor from having to deal with the problem employee.
- d) To encourage an employee who performed poorly at beginning of year but improved. This encourages people to do whatever they want throughout the year but then to be on their best behavior during the month preceding the evaluation.
- e) To attempt to ensure the boss' unit receives high raises/bonuses & looks good to the rest of the company
- f) To assure subordinates get as big a share of the pie as possible so they are contented and do not cause problems for the supervisor.
- g) To avoid letting others know that there are problems in the unit/department - after all if everyone gets a good rating they figure others will decide the unit must be operating well.

The association between performance appraisal and feedback can create a situation where the capacity of the individual and the organization to learn, unlearn and relearn has been jeopardized. Yet even the greatest detractors of performance appraisal would be likely to agree that feedback, when delivered in a timely and effective manner, is an essential part of real learning and development.

Feedback Used Correctly Is a Powerful Success Agent

Survival and success for individuals, organizations and systems is directly related to the ability to learn, unlearn and relearn – what I will refer to as adaptive growth and development. Achieving such adaptive growth and development requires a number of things, first and foremost of which is feedback and the ability to react to it in productive ways. Despite the potential problems with performance appraisal systems gone awry, if feedback is essential for growth and development, it seems somewhat self-destructive for individuals and organizations to avoid the practice of feedback just because they have had a negative experience with performance appraisal.

The most useful/helpful feedback systems are those where the behaviors and results being evaluated are directly tied to the values and goals of the organization. This means that for performance appraisal to be optimally effective, the organization must first have a clear knowledge of its values and goals and be able to articulate them in a way that makes them easily understood and appreciated across all levels of employees.

Over time, organizations tend to get whatever behaviors they reward. For example, the organization may articulate that it values competence, teamwork and customer and service, but when raises and bonuses are awarded, they are based on individual sales alone. Eventually, regardless of the organization's rhetoric, this type of reward pattern could actually discourage the very behavior desired. The organization could end up with employees who compete rather than collaborate with each other and who are willing to victimize customers in order to make a sale. In such an environment, ultimately the poor client service, the lack of teamwork and/or the unpleasant work environment will come back to hurt the organization.

Although performance feedback is important and valuable, it does not ensure that everyone in the organization will be a top performer. Even when well designed and executed, performance appraisal alone can not be optimally effective unless it is combined with performance management.

About Performance Management

Performance management is the application of performance feedback and other behavior modification techniques to shape behavior in desired directions. It includes coaching, mentoring, feedback, positive reinforcement, role modeling, counseling, recognition/rewards for top performance, incentives AND performance appraisal. Unlike performance appraisal, however, which is episodic, effective performance management is ongoing and continuous.

Kathleen Guinn in a 1987 article in TRAINING Magazine (“Performance Management: Not Just An Annual Appraisal”) compared performance appraisal and performance management - “The difference between the two is analogous to two different but equally important activities in the world of business and finance: financial management and the annual audit. The annual audit benefits managers . . . by providing a ‘snapshot’ of its financial situation that can be studied, analyzed and evaluated. . . . However the audit itself is not part of the daily process of managing the organization’s financial performance.” Thus performance management is an ongoing year-round process, one part of which is performance appraisal.

With the audit analogy in mind, it is easy to understand why an annual appraisal is not, by itself likely to substantially modify behavior on an ongoing basis. Altering long-standing behavior patterns and entrenched habits is difficult work. It does not flow automatically from the fact that feedback has been given. People need help in unlearning old behaviors that have become an integral part of how they do things. They also need help in learning new skills and behaviors that will make them optimally effective performers. Feedback (i.e. appraisal) is only a beginning – the rest of growing an optimally effective performer lies in performance management.

Ten years after Guinn’s article appeared in TRAINING Magazine, Monci Williams published an article in The Harvard Management Update (February 1997) entitled “Performance Appraisal is Dead, Long Live Performance Management!” Reaffirming the position taken by Guinn ten years earlier, he added “ In leading edge systems, companies don’t just talk about lofty missions or strategic aims They define the specific behaviors that embody these goals, communicate them to employees, and ‘appraise’ their performance on those behaviors . . . appraisal is not the end but a kind of beginning.” Williams goes on to explain that improving employee performance (and hence corporate performance) involves a two way process that is ongoing and includes feedback, coaching, goal-setting, planned development and training and identification of both individual and workforce skill deficits. Leading edge companies/firms don’t just train and develop to meet present needs – they anticipate what skills will be needed in the future and begin to develop them now.

Some Keys To Successful Performance Management

Feedback – Just as it would not be reasonable to expect to get to a particular location if the pilot or captain of the ship had no navigational information, it is not reasonable to expect a person to develop in any particular direction absent performance feedback. However, feedback in the form of an annual appraisal simply won’t cut it any more than a single reading of the instrument panel at any one point in time could effectively enable a pilot to fly from New York to Los Angeles. Feedback is needed at many points along the way and is especially valuable when one is veering off course.

Clarifying Expectations – Most people want to do a good job. Generally, if a good hire has been made, the person has the ability to do the job well. So why then, are supervisors so often disappointed in the performance of their subordinates? One

reason is that many supervisors fail to adequately communicate what a good job looks like and make the assumption that somehow the subordinate does and should know such things. Often this is an erroneous assumption.

Whenever an assignment is given, especially to a new or relatively new employee, it should come with a full set of clearly articulated expectations as to the nature of the desired product, time frames and instructions on what to do if the assignment is not going well or is in jeopardy of being late or poorly done. Expectations communicated should be high enough to be motivating but not so high as to be demoralizing.

Recognition/Rewards – As any Psychology 101 student knows, behaviors that are rewarded tend to be repeated and those that are either punished or ignored tend to drop out of a person's repertoire. It follows then that organizations need to be especially careful to recognize and reward those behaviors that are consistent with organizational values and goals. Similarly those behaviors that are inconsistent with the organization's values or impede progress toward organizational goals should be punished or ignored but certainly not rewarded.

Focus On Behavior, Not Personalities – From time to time, almost all employees will need to be given some negative feedback. In doing so, it is important to preserve the employee's self esteem and motivation. It is the behavior that is bad, not the employee. A person can do something badly or inappropriately and still be a good person. A dumb behavior does not a dumb employee make. If the manager and others start thinking of the employee as stupid and treating him as such, the self-fulfilling prophesy is likely to take over as self-confidence is eroded and defensive behavior is initiated.

Expect Excellence And Communicate To Others That You Have Confidence In Them – The Self-fulfilling prophesy can generate positive behavior just as it can generate negative behavior. When people are self-confident and know that their managers and supervisors believe in them and trust them to do an excellent job, they generally rise to the occasion.

Coaching and Developing Others – Effective coaching is an ongoing process whereby the person being coached not only learns new skills and becomes more effective but also gains the ability to further develop himself/herself in the absence of the coach. A good coach will also assist in creating a learning environment – one where the person being coached is given the resources necessary to enhance his/her skills, where intelligent and responsible risk-taking is not just tolerated but encouraged, where barriers to self-improvement are eliminated and where job assignments are designed to create a learning experience.

The literature of emotional intelligence as presented by such authors as Daniel Goleman, David Ryback, Hendrie Weisinger as well as the writings of Stephen Covey are replete with references to the need to listen, understand, empathize and be able to see things from the perspective of others. As Covey says "If I were to summarize the single most important principle I have learned in the field of interpersonal

relations, it would be this: Seek first to understand, then to be understood.” . (The 7 Habits of Highly Effective People: Powerful Lessons in Personal Change, Simon and Shuster Inc.: New York, 1989). For example, you are unlikely to be able to meet the needs of your customers, your subordinates, your colleagues or your bosses if you have not listened to them enough to know what they are.

Daniel Goleman, author of Emotional Intelligence :Why it Can Matter More than IQ (Bantam Books:New York, 1997and Working with Emotional Intelligence, Bantam Books:New York, 1998) points out “In its original sense in systems theory, *feedback* meant the exchange of data about how one part of a system is working, with the understanding that one part affects all others in the system so that any part heading off course could be changed for the better. In a company everyone is part of the system, and so feedback is the lifeblood of the organization – the exchange of information that lets people know if the job they are doing is going well or needs to be fine-tuned, upgraded or redirected entirely. Without feedback, people are in the dark; they have no idea how they stand with their boss, with their peers, or in terms of what is expected of them, and any problems will only get worse as time passes.”

Similarly, without feedback, organizations and systems are operating like unguided missiles. Like individuals, organizations can benefit from feedback from their employees, their customers and even their suppliers. Key indicators that are reviewed on a regular basis can be helpful as can surveys of staff and customers. Like with individuals, the areas in which feedback is sought should be related to the goals and values of the organization. For individuals feedback should also be clearly related to the individual’s goals and the demand characteristics of the job itself.

Guidelines for Delivering Feedback

It seems logical that the greater the amount and rate of change the greater the need for feedback. Yesterday’s feedback and information may no longer be useful when the rules of the playing field have changed and the nature of the behaviors needed for success has been altered. Some guidelines (adapted and extended from the work of Harry Levinson of the Levinson Institute at Harvard) for the nature and delivery of feedback whether to individuals, organizations or systems are:

1. Feedback should be specific. General feedback does not help a person know what or how to change to be more effective. Telling people they did a bad job is demoralizing and not instructive. The same logic holds true for praise. In order for someone to intentionally repeat a good behavior he/she needs to know just what that behavior is. To avoid repeating negative behaviors, the person must understand just what the negative behavior is that should be altered.
2. Good feedback does not just pose a problem but also offers a solution or an approach to rectifying the problem behavior. A discussion of alternative possible solutions may be in order if the person, organization or system had not been aware of the relevant deficiencies or had not previously considered alternative ways of doing things in this area.

3. Feedback should occur in a time frame proximate to the event or behavior under consideration. Long time delays between the event and the feedback tend to dilute any positive impact the feedback might have. To have a significant impact on performance, feedback should occur regularly and not be an isolate event occurring one to four times a year on a pre-determined schedule.
4. Ideally, feedback, whether positive or negative should be given face to face and in private. Such communication via e-mail, voice-mail or memos makes it difficult for the recipient to get clarification or to ask questions. It also makes the feedback seem impersonal and by so doing may either dilute its impact or alienate the receiver of the feedback.
5. Feedback should be delivered with empathy and sensitivity. It is important to remember that the goal of the feedback is to positively impact behavior and to help the individual, the organization or the system grow and develop. Feedback delivered in a hostile, negative or uncaring manner is likely to generate resentment and hostility.

As Monci J. Williams (Performance Appraisal is Dead. Long Live Performance Management Harvard Management Update, February, 1997) points out “Companies achieve results not by poring over numbers, but by poring over the people who do the things that make the numbers what they are.”

JOAN WAGNER ZINOBER

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Joan Zinober holds a Ph.D. in Psychology and a Masters in Business Administration. A licensed psychologist she has served on the faculty of the University of South Florida and Florida State University. A consultant and management trainer for over eighteen years she has had wide ranging experience in management, leadership, development, training and organization development. She serves as a Board Member of the Society of Psychologists in Management, is a member of the American and Florida Psychological Associations and is an Associate Member of the American Bar Association (ABA). Additionally she served on ABA's Practice Management Leadership Activities Board and the Massachusetts Bar. An experienced author and editor she has served as co-editor of the *Journal of Practice Management* and is currently co-editor of the *Journal of Practice Development and Marketing* of the ABA. She is also a member of the Florida Bar's Professional Responsibility Committee, the Futurist Committee of the Practice Management Section of the ABA and the Director ..

Dr. Zinober has designed and conducted workshops for managers and supervisors, administrators, government employees, lawyers, doctors, and business leaders on leadership, communications, hiring, conflict management, motivating employees, improving management and supervisory skills, managing in a changing environment and performance appraisal. She has provided one-on-one feedback and development to managers and executives. In her work with clients she has conducted job analyses, written job descriptions and designed performance evaluation systems. Dr. Zinober has facilitated planning and team building retreats. As an organization development consultant she has developed and implemented numerous instruments to assess client/customer satisfaction, management leadership skills, employee satisfaction, or process efficacy and service effectiveness.

Dr. Zinober has served as a consultant to the National Institute of Mental Health, to the Department of Health and Human Services, to businesses and governmental agencies, to hospitals and health care delivery organizations, and to law firms, accounting firms and medical practices. She has been adjunct faculty for the Center for Executive Leadership Development Program serving as a staff individual feedback provider.

Additionally she has edited a book and published numerous articles in medical management journals, legal management journals, magazines, newsletters, accounting management journals and other professional journals. She received ABA Practice Management Section recognition for outstanding writing. Her articles address various aspects of leadership, quality of life and human relations in professional practices and include such varied topics as practice governance, performance appraisal and development, coaching, resolving conflicts, client satisfaction surveys, managing and motivating employees, the value of practice retreats, hiring and selecting employees and professionals, leading and managing in a changing environment and loyalty. She has been quoted by other authors on topics such as hiring a practice administrator, management by listening around, performance appraisal and the importance of values clarification, with training and

experience in both psychology and business, she brings a unique set of skills to the process of organizational assessment and diagnosis.

Dr. Zinober is President of Center for the Professions, a consulting firm in Tallahassee, Florida, that specializes in organizational diagnosis, performance appraisal, team building, leadership, management consulting and training, interviews for hiring, promotion, and personal feedback to individual managers, leaders, and executives. She may be reached at 904 Bayshore Boulevard, Tallahassee, Florida 32304, phone 904 933 1100, or e-mail zan@in.aol.com.

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