

THREE QUESTIONS TO CREATE ACCOUNTABILITY



By Sherry Knight, President and CEO, Dimension 11 Ltd.

It was a large company with over 100 years of experience – and never a formal performance evaluation conducted! Yet, things seemed to work well. In the discussions about introducing a formal process, there were the usual concerns:

- It's worked well this way for a century – why change now?
- It's just a way to browbeat our people – why would we want to do that?
- There will be pushback from the staff.

These are all legitimate concerns, especially when we look at the way performance evaluations were generally implemented. Rather than being a tool to show people what they were doing wrong – and it often was and still is – it is much better to use performance evaluations as a way to lay out goals and plans for the future. Only then can performance evaluations be a valuable source of guidance and inspiration toward accomplishment and success.

Organizations have used performance evaluation forms on a yearly (some even more frequently, every six months) basis to guide employees toward improvement. This is especially true when the focus was not on goal setting! What good is something six months or a year old in helping an individual improve performance? Hopefully,

more companies are moving away from this less than stellar approach to productivity.

Being that it's the 21st century, perhaps it is time to take away the "carrot and stick" approach and instead help individuals to be more accountable for themselves. By guiding people in exploring their own desires as it relates to the workplace, we just may help them find satisfaction in all they do. After all, employees do give about one-third of their life to their company! Imagine if they owned the satisfaction they got from providing that part of their life to your company.

Feedback is critical to one's well-being. Without feedback, one simply carries on believing in what one is presently doing. Let's look at the process to help individuals be the best they can be. Remember: no one gets up in the morning thinking "What kind of mess can I make of my job today?" We just don't do this!

Setting Goals

Sit down in a one-on-one meeting with your direct report. Together decide what needs to happen in order to meet departmental and corporate goals. Now that the two of you have decided on the goals, you will want to ask two questions:

1. What resources do you need to accomplish these goals?
2. What needs to be eliminated so you can accomplish these goals?

Help your staff develop their sense of self-accountability. Show your direct reports how they can be accountable, first to themselves and then to the organization. This takes pressure off you and allows them to be self-reliant. A bonus on all accounts!

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A Gallup poll conducted in 2014 found 68.5 per cent of American employees felt they were "disengaged" or "actively disengaged" in their work.¹ Based on other findings, this number is probably similar in Canada. Ouch!

Here is one way to change this lack of engagement and help your employees help themselves. The key is to help employees focus on what they can control. As humans, everyone likes to feel in control of their lives rather than feel someone else is pulling the strings.

Ask your employee to answer these questions every day:

1. *Am I doing my best to write down clear goals today?*
Without a written goal working toward departmental and corporate goals, there is little possibility of reaching what we want to do each day.
2. *Am I doing my best to move toward these goals today?*
Generally, we are moving toward something or away from it, and if we are standing still, we're not making progress – when moving toward a goal we feel more satisfaction.
3. *Am I doing my best to find meaning in my job today?*
Remember, "meaning" is found internally rather than externally – help people take responsibility for themselves instead of relying on others for meaning.

It's usually best to give answers using a scale of 1 to 10, with 1 being low and 10 being high.

As a big believer in the old adage "inspect what you expect," I believe it is important to always follow-up with our employees. Have your staff answer the above three questions daily (Marshall Goldsmith suggests doing this on a weekly or biweekly spreadsheet) and have them send their answers to you at the end of each day by email. This way, you can begin to see patterns and influence them regularly to do the things they want to do in order to be the best they can be!

With this approach, you can connect every couple of weeks and have a meaningful conversation about their successes and solutions, and thus your direct report can feel greater accomplishment in their day.

The future of work can be rewarding – it just means finding ways to help employees make it rewarding for themselves instead of relying on external forces to make them feel good. This does not take away the need for recognition from you, the boss; it merely plants the greatest and most important recognition where it belongs – on oneself!

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Going back to our 100-year-old organization, imagine what might have happened if they had helped people feel more in control of their goals. Try these simple techniques today and see the change in your department. 📧

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¹ <http://www.gallup.com/poll/181289/majority-employees-not-engaged-despite-gains-2014.aspx>

Sherry Knight, is President and CEO of Dimension 11 Ltd., a leader in people and performance development. Dimension 11 helps companies realize stronger profits so they can create more jobs and better communities.

Sherry Knight | 306-586-2315
sherry@dimension11.com | www.dimension11.com

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