



Management and Performance Associates – March 2010

Am I doing the right thing?

Check your knowledge by matching the two following columns:

Tool	Purpose
(1) Feedback	(A) To promote staff's development by releasing their potential, using a Socratic process.
(2) Performance Appraisal	(B) To reinforce a positive behavior or re-direct an ineffective behavior.
(3) Coaching	(C) To close the cycle, considering all results accomplished by the employee, as well as demonstration of competencies.

If your results are 1B, 2C and 3A, congratulations! You clearly understand the objective of each of these people management tools. Even if you got it right, we're sure this newsletter will bring you additional useful information.

Having clarity of the purpose for each management tool does not guarantee management effectiveness. Inappropriate use of the tools will reduce effectiveness. Let's examine some situations that exemplify this problem, starting with the inappropriate naming of the tools.

1) **Calling the employee for a coaching session, when the more appropriate action would be providing feedback**

Let's imagine a situation where the manager has observed his employee not using courtesy during an interaction with a customer. As soon as the customer walks away the manager comes to the employee and says with a clearly

disapproving tone: "Let me give you some coaching. This is not the way to treat a customer. Are you nuts? You said the client was ignorant."

What is the problem in this situation? In reality, what are the *problems*?

- 1) Coaching is not feedback. As this relates to something specific and not a developmental process, the manager should have said that he would provide feedback on the way the employee managed the situation with the customer.
- 2) The way the feedback was provided. A quality feedback statement contains three parts: Describe the observed **result or behavior**, its **impact on performance**, and what to do in a similar situation in the **future**, since in this situation we are re-directing behavior.

2) **Conduct a performance appraisal without prior feedback throughout the performance cycle**

Unfortunately, more frequently than we'd like to hear, people mention that they do not understand the evaluation provided by their managers. As they never received feedback throughout the year, they believed they were meeting the manager's expectations...until they received the written evaluation, way below what they considered to be fair.

What are the problems here? Easily identified:

- 1) Lack of frequent feedback, signaling how well (or not) the employee is performing.
- 2) One way evaluation, not a conversation to calibrate each other's perceptions.
- 3) Lack of clarity in relation to the managerial expectations toward the employee.

3) **Provide step by step instructions on what the employee needs to do to improve performance, in a conversation that is supposed to be about coaching**

An employee has just assumed the responsibility to manage a high visibility project.



During the first project meeting, the new project manager realizes that she did not feel comfortable dealing with the inevitable conflict situations. As soon as she leaves the meeting she goes to her manager to request a coaching process to develop these missing skills. The manager, very helpful, asks her to sit down, offers a cup of coffee, and starts to highlight her strengths, what he believes needs to be improved, and after 20 minutes starts offering advice on how to deal with conflict during the project.

The employee leaves the meeting feeling very frustrated and clearly not committed to the suggestions offered by the manager. She feels frustrated because she expected to discuss how to develop specific skills while the manager was focused on providing feedback. She feels not committed because nobody commits to what they hear, but with what they say. One of the great advantages of conducting coaching processes using a Socratic method (asking questions to stimulate rational thinking) is to increase the coachee's awareness and to stimulate her to find her own way, including developing her own alternatives and action plan.

In summary, having the necessary knowledge is not enough if the tools are not producing the desired results.

This month we invited Vidalia de Casado, Vice President in charge of Onboard Services, COPA Airlines, from Panama, to share her best practices with our readers. This is what she has to say about the topic:

“To be useful, Performance Appraisals must be continuous activities, not only conducted at the end of the year. In this process, managers assess staff competencies (once or twice per year) and goals (two to four times a year). By doing so, they check that employees are achieving their individual goals in support of overall corporate goals, and that they are working on their competencies to achieve development and growth inside the company.

The coaching process is not hierarchical. You may get coaching from your peers as well as from your boss. It is a way to support people development. The main difference is that instead of focusing on what is going well or not, we ask questions so that the coachees find their own answers to their problems or development issues. For instance, if your staff wants to grow, a question could be: *How could you prepare to be ready for the next career step?* It is the coachee's responsibility to find alternatives and solutions; the coach's job is to facilitate this process. I believe that managers who coach their teams are able to develop people, allowing for their easier growth.”

See you next month. Suggestions are welcome.

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