

Articles for Managers

Ouch! It Hurts To Think This Much! Communicating Performance Targets

by Ian Cook



Ian Cook, trainer, consultant, keynote speaker and Principal of Fulcrum Associates Inc., helps managers and supervisors get more from their people and teams through modern leadership approaches. Contact Ian to discuss the ideas in this article or to find out about related training programs, facilitation and coaching services, and keynote presentations for your organization.

Are your employees clear about what you expect from their performance this year? I should be able to come in as a consultant, sit down one-on-one with any individual who reports to you and ask him or her, "What will constitute 'fully satisfactory' and 'outstanding' performance by you over the current year? Please describe it for me." When I then meet with you and ask the same question about the individual, your answer and theirs should pretty well match.

In working with organizations large and small, I am repeatedly amazed at how few people really know what their priorities are and what performance standards their boss expects them to meet. As a result they assume certain standards or, more typically, they just keep working from day to day until at year-end they receive a surprise "thumbs up" or "thumbs down" in their performance review.

"[Communicating] performance targets is at the very core of being a professional leader manager."

But why don't more managers worldwide do this well? Why don't they identify what they expect from their direct reports? Why do they leave such a vital item as expected results so fuzzy? I mean, **WHAT COULD BE MORE IMPORTANT?** Let me suggest a couple of reasons. See if these apply to you.

Sometimes the manager truly does not know. Maybe he (or 'she' with this pronoun) has not received clear priorities and expected deliverables for his unit from his own boss. If this is true for you, then obviously you need to have that conversation with your boss about his expectations.

Often, the manager is unable to find the time to articulate performance expectations for each employee. Hey, managers are super busy today. They have more people reporting to them than ever before and they face immediate pressures, fires to fight, sixty-five e-mails to answer and just generally "doing more with less."

But there is a number one reason they don't communicate expectations. Let's face it, *it is hard mental work for any of us to decide what we truly want from our employees.* We have to think of the various areas of each person's job and determine what level of output is fair to expect and what standards we will measure it against. Besides, frequently we don't know that much about a particular job. We may never have performed it ourselves.

Here is my advice. Take the time! Map it out. Have your employees themselves identify key result areas for their job and suggest the numerical indicators or observable behaviors to be reviewed during the year and at review time. This will enable your people to plan their activity, commit to results and self-monitor their progress towards goal achievement.

Communicating performance targets is not some extra task that keeps you from "the real work." It is at the very core of being a *professional leader/manager.*

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