

## How to Maintain Improved Performance

Improving the performance of staff is hard enough, maintaining and building on that improvement presents even greater challenges for managers. Most improvement processes consist of four broad stages – agreeing on the standards or expectations, monitoring progress, recognising achievement, and reviewing the performance displayed – with recognition and review featuring prominently in any maintenance plan. To foster ongoing improvement in your staff, consider the following...

### 1. Link behavior to outcomes

Employees have to know what their improved performance – and the maintenance of that improvement – means to the organisation for two main reasons. Firstly, employees need to realise that if the organisation prospers, so too do their opportunities for advancement and their job security is enhanced. Secondly, employees must understand that their actions impact on others, thereby increasing interdependence and a desire to continue to improve.

### 2. Demonstrate your commitment to continuing improvement

Schedule regular meetings with individual employees to talk about the importance of improved work performance – for the organisation and for them. At those meetings you need to demonstrate your knowledge of the employee's accomplishments by describing in specific terms what you have observed. Be sure to compliment the achievements and offer further appropriate encouragement. Maintaining improved performance means that you have to be 'on the ball' at all times.

### 3. Reinforce desirable behaviours

Recognition is a powerful motivating tool that helps to bring out the best in people by reinforcing observed improvements. A few well-chosen words at the right time can mean a lot to someone trying to do better. But that's only one example of how you can reinforce desirable behaviour. Positive reinforcement can also be traced to these four managerial behaviours:

- Create a work climate that is warm, supportive, trusting and encouraging.
- Provide learning opportunities that let employees know that it is OK to fail
- Be available to listen, even when you know its news you would rather not hear

- Show that you know what employees are doing so that you can tell them how they are doing

### 4. Encourage staff to blow their own horn

When people are proud of their accomplishments, they will want to tell you how they did it. However, the majority are likely to be reluctant starters in self-promotion. So, provide opportunities for them to talk about their improvements and to bask in their moments of glory. Your actions will indicate that you consider their accomplishments to be important and more particularly, that you value their extra efforts. When employees see that you understand and value their contributions, they will be inspired to give even more. And, of course, your active listening is helping to maintain improved performance.

### 5. Listen to what staff have to say

If you have worked at building a positive and constructive climate, do not hesitate to ask employees for suggestions on how you can help them to maintain their improved performance. Together, you will come up with ideas to minimise or eliminate any problems that get in the way of continuing improvements. If you are able to grant a request or act on a suggestion, indicate what actions you are able to take, and when. If you are not sure, explain that you will have to look into the situation further and will respond by a certain date. Your actions will encourage employees to be involved in future projects.

### 6. Show your appreciation

Thanking employees for improved performance reinforces any praise given earlier. The effectiveness of a simple 'thank you' is increased when it is the last thing the employees hears at the end of a conversation with you. Realistically, employees cannot expect that you can solve all of their problems, but they have every right to expect from you courteous and reinforcing behaviour.

Source: *Just About everything a manager needs to know*, Neil Flanagan & Jarvis Finger