



SHARPENING THE SAW

"Why can't I get my employees to do the things we ask them to do?"

Most healthcare organizations, regardless of size, location or profitability, all struggle with the same issues. One common issue is getting employees and physicians to do what they are supposed to do.

In our work with departmental and unit level managers, one of the questions we get asked most often is, "Why can't I get my employees to do the things we ask them to do?" Other versions of this question are, "I am having trouble getting them to do (fill in the blank), what advice do you have for me?" Or, "How can I instill a sense of personal accountability in my staff?"

Those of you that have worked with me in our Leadership Development Institutes know that I believe in simplicity and formulas. My motto is "Keep it simple, follow the formula!" This concept guides my answers to managers who ask these questions. When answering, I tell managers there are essentially only four reasons for nonperformance. The key is to determine which of the four reasons apply in each case and then provide the remedy for that reason.

Reason #1: The employee does not know they are supposed to do the job in a specific way. This is always the first question to ask in any instance of nonperformance. I advise the manager to go to the employee and say, "Tell me what you are supposed to do in this situation." Note how closely their answer matches your mental vision of what is supposed to happen in the given situation.

In our work with management teams we often hear, "Everyone knows they are supposed to do this, it is just common sense." I think you will be surprised how often your vision differs from that of your staff. In fact, the common sense you think everyone has might not be common at all. Correcting this miscommunication will fix many of your nonperformance challenges.

Reason #2: They know what they are supposed to do, but do not know how to do it. This is essentially an issue of training. In this circumstance, employees want to perform, they just do not know how because they have not been trained properly. Once you are sure they know what they are supposed to do, the next question to ask is, "Am I sure they have been trained to do it the way I want them to do it?" We are always surprised at the number of institutions that add instructional language to their policy and procedures manual and then assume that training has been done regarding application or compliance with the new requirements. Managers must give their staff the tools to be able to comply with the requirements of the job.

Remember that telling is not training. Just telling an employee they should "do it this way" is not sufficient. Effective training includes four elements:

1. Explanation
2. Demonstration
3. Practice
4. Reinforcement and feedback

If what you consider training does not include these four elements, the employee has not been trained properly.

Reason #3: They know what they are supposed to do, but do not have the physical and/or mental capacity to perform it. In other words, no matter how much training you give them, they are unable to do the job. This is often the most misdiagnosed reason for nonperformance. Experts estimate that up to 80 percent of the time supervisors are incorrect when they determine this is the reason for nonperformance.

Therefore, if you are positive the employee knows what they are supposed to do, and you are absolutely

sure they have received plenty of constructive training to do it, and they are still not doing it, ask "Does this person have the mental and/or physical capacity to do this job?"

The answer may be the employee does not have the capacity to do the job effectively with the amount of training you are willing to provide to them. Alternatively, you might have made a hiring mistake and the person is not suited for the job you are asking them to do.

Reason #4: They know what to do, how to do it and they have the capacity to do it, but choose (for many reasons) not to do it. This is willful noncompliance.

The noncompliance may stem from these thought patterns:

- My way is better
- Your way will not work
- I do not want to change
- I am unable to do it because of institutional obstacles
- I do not want to do it
- I will not be supported if I do it



The manager must determine why the employee is not performing and address the reason immediately.

This response involves three components:

1. Provide convincing information that the organization's way is better than the employee's way
2. Provide positive rewards for good performance
3. Provide negative consequences for nonperformance

Knowing and using these four reasons for nonperformance have helped me tremendously during my military career and in cofounding and leading two successful businesses. Whenever I have been confronted with nonperformance I ask myself, "Which of the four reasons is the cause?" If it is reason #1 or #2, I provide training to fix the problem. If it is reason #3, it is best to let the employee go as soon as possible. We do not do the employee or the organization any favors by keeping them in a job they are not capable of performing. If it is reason #4, and I am unable to

change the employee's behavior through positive rewards or negative consequences, again it is best to let that employee go as soon as possible.

Effective management of staff is not magic. It is taking specific actions to obtain the behaviors from employees that benefit the organization. It is the things managers do that influence people's performance. If managers do not do the right things at the right times, or in the right sequence, performance outcomes will not be satisfactory. Use these reasons for nonperformance to help you do the right things, in the right sequence, to obtain the performance you want.



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LifeWings Partners LLC was founded by a former U.S. Navy Top Gun instructor and commercial airline pilot. The firm specializes in applying aviation-based teamwork training and safety tools to help healthcare facilities save patients' lives and reduce costs. LifeWings has helped more than 70 facilities nationwide provide better care to their patients.

Reference:
Harden SW. Sharpening the saw: a message from the president.
The Pulse. June 2007.



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