



Why Performance Problems Occur

Most marginal performance problems fall into one of the following four categories. In each instance, well-maintained documentation can help.

The good employee turned sour. The manager has to determine why a formerly dependable employee begins to slack off. Well-kept documentation can help to determine if the change is due to a personal problem, employee burnout, even a physical problem.

A staff member doesn't reach his or her potential. In this case, a rising young employee on the "fast track" suddenly falls on his face. In this case, documentation can show at what point the employee may have been pushed too hard or too fast.

A worker isn't motivated. Most of us need to feel challenged and stimulated in our work. Therefore, when the amount of work is too small, or the level of difficulty too low, employees can become lackadaisical and disinterested, resulting in marginal performance.

The staff member has no clear idea about the nature of the problem. Unsatisfactory performance is sometimes simply a matter of poor communication of performance standards between the supervisor and the employee.

Visit www.amanet.org to learn performance management at AMA's management seminars.

Building a Sense of Teamwork

When you have built a team, you have put together a group of people who are highly committed and consider themselves mutually accountable to achieve results. They each have clearly defined roles. They have measurable goals and a visible purpose around which to unite. And they have a leader—you.

This is true teamwork.

Many divisions and departments do not operate as teams—that is, "practice teamwork." This is unfortunate because teamwork is critical to organization productivity and profitability.

When people work together in an atmosphere of trust and accountability toward a common goal, they put aside turf issues and politics and focus on the tasks to be done. This leads to three major bottom-line benefits:

1. Better problem solving
2. Greater productivity
3. More effective use of resources

There is also a group of softer benefits of teamwork that greatly enhances the workplace:

1. People enjoy working together and teamwork satisfies a need for socialization.
2. Working together helps people grow as they learn from each other.
3. Working together toward a common goal provides a sense of purpose that is motivating and fulfilling.

How would you know if your staff works like a team? You would see these characteristics or traits:



Openness and candor.

When real teamwork is present, team members, because they basically trust each other, are more open and honest with each other.

Acceptance of assignments. When real teamwork exists, team mem-

bers willingly accept assignments.

Understood and accepted goals. A team needs purpose, direction and goals. These are accepted by the members of the team, and they work collaboratively to achieve them.

Progress and results assessed. Teamwork requires that members be results-directed as opposed to process-oriented. Their focus is on their objectives, and their activities are directed toward those goals.

To gain the full advantage of teamwork, check out AMA's public and onsite team building meetings at www.amanet.org.

AMA Soundings

- 26% of companies do not reward innovation, but
- 20.9% recognize innovation with non-financial rewards,
- 19.3% reward innovation with challenging work and/or autonomy,
- 17.6% acknowledge innovation with individual bonuses and/or salary increases.
- 9.2% consider innovation in promotion decisions.
- 4.4% reward through bonuses.
- 2% reward with larger budgets.

For more insights on innovation, check out the AMAVHRI Study *The Quest for Innovation* at www.amanet.org/research.

Team Involvement in Goal Setting and Planning

Where teamwork is practiced, members often participate actively in setting group goals relating either to their operation or the corporation as a whole. Hammering out the goals collectively not only utilizes the wisdom of the entire group but secures ownership to the group goals. People are more likely to support that to which they have contributed and created, as opposed to having to accept something handed down from on high.

In anticipation of the planning or goal-setting session, you should be sure that you can:

Be clear on management's planned direction for the organization. Understand the corporate vision and



be prepared to explain it to your employees.

Define your group's role in the organization. Identify what the team has traditionally been doing and also any possible expanded role, as envisioned by you and top management.

Make an outline of all points you want to cover during the meeting. While your ideas may be revised by the input of others during the meeting, you need to go into the goal-setting or planning meeting with a clear vision of how the group will support senior management's objectives and the corporate mission.

Have a large writing board on which you can list suggestions from your employees. Be prepared to list all the

ideas that the group suggests, then pare them down to four or five objectives or goals for the year.

Prepare your employees before the meeting. Ask them to think about the present and future goals of the department and to be ready to discuss them at the meeting.

Afterward, while writing up the goal-setting session, you should evaluate the final plans. To help in this review, ask yourself these questions:

- Does the plan contribute to the achievement of the department goal and, therefore, corporate goals?
- Are the underlying assumptions valid?
- Is it clear what is to be done?
- Is it clear who will be responsible for the tasks that make up the plan?
- Is the plan feasible? If it isn't, how can it be made feasible?
- How can the plan's progress be monitored to determine if it is succeeding?
- Is the cost of implementation higher than payback?
- How will we measure the plan's success?

Visit www.amanet.org to learn about the new onsite teambuilding programs offered by AMA.

Dos and Don'ts for Issuing Unpopular Decisions

Do take the time to gather all the relevant facts before making a major policy decision.

Do rehearse in advance how you will announce the news to your staff.

Do make yourself available to answer questions from your staff.

Do allow your staff some time to adjust to the news.

Do let your staff know the reasons behind your decisions.

Don't blame management for forcing you to give bad news to your staff.

Don't avoid issues and spring surprise changes on your staff members.

Don't join in the complaining about a new management policy.

Don't use ambiguous language in order to "soften the blow."

Don't forget that as a manager you should protect your employee's interests as best as you can.

For more help in decision making, check out AMA's leadership and management seminars. Visit www.amanet.org/seminars.

Talk Your Teamwork

How you talk around your team reveals whether you've really embraced teamwork in your own mind. Although the difference in words may be subtle, it reflects where you're really coming from. For instance:

Don't say *I*, say *We*.

Don't say *Your*, say *Our*.

Don't ask, *What's the problem?* Say, *Let's find out what's wrong.*

Don't ask, *What do you need?* Ask, *What do we need?*

Don't ask, *What are you going to do about it?* Ask, *What should we do about it?*

Don't ask, *Who's responsible for this?*
Ask, *How can we fix it?*

Don't say, *You're doing it wrong.* Ask, *How about trying it this way?*

Don't say, *This isn't good enough.* Say, *We have to do better.*

Don't say, *I don't believe you should....*
Ask, *Why don't we try...?*

To perfect your communication skills, check out AMA's many communication seminars at www.amanet.org/seminars.

Struggling to Manage Knowledge Workers

BY MARK VICKERS

Peter Drucker, who died last November at the age of 95, was not only a legendary management thinker but among the most prescient as well. Back in 1969, for example, he was already writing about something he called “knowledge work” and saying that one of the greatest management challenges of the 20th century would be figuring out how to make such work more productive.

As it turns out, he was understating the difficulty of the challenge. Into the 21st century, organizations are still trying to get a handle on the best methods of managing knowledge work. In fact, just trying to define the term “knowledge worker” can be difficult. Drucker defined such a worker as “someone who knows more about his or her job than anyone else in the organization.”

Others have tried to narrow the focus. In his new book *Thinking for a Living*, Thomas Davenport states that although most jobs require a base of knowledge, knowledge workers “have high degrees of expertise, education or experience, and the primary purpose of their jobs involves the creation, distribution or application of knowledge.” It’s estimated that anywhere from 28% to 45% of the U.S. workforce is now made up of knowledge workers.

One key problem is that a lot of these knowledge workers are not using their time as well as they might. In fact, many are just plain exhausted from working long hours, some of which are mispent. “Professionals are still being managed as if they were in factories, in organizations designed to keep everybody siloed. At less well-run companies, you’re struck by how frustrated people are,” notes Shoshana Zuboff, the former Harvard professor. “They work like dogs and are wasting time.”

But exactly *how* they’re wasting time is an important management question, and what techniques will allow them to work more productively is an even bigger one. There’s evidence that knowledge workers are burdened with lots of low-value inter-



nal communication. Therefore, one theory is that companies have got to help their knowledge workers manage social networks more efficiently.

Some organizations are seeking high-tech methods such as online directories that help knowledge workers pinpoint knowledge experts within their organizations. Other experts prefer to focus on tacit knowledge and wisdom rather than the kind of information that can be transferred via technologies. Dorothy Leonard, co-author of *Deep Smarts: How to Cultivate and Transfer Essential Business Wisdom*, writes, “Technology has immensely improved access to, and transmission of, information, but it cannot create shortcuts to the most valuable kinds of knowledge. That dilemma

explains much about why organizations still have trouble managing knowledge.” Expert knowledge tends to be tacit knowledge, she argues, and it generally is based on experience.

Then there are experts such as Michael Hammer, co-author of *Reengineering the Corporation*, who believes that focusing on the productivity of individual knowledge workers is misguided. “The goal is not to get more out of individuals but to get more out of the entire organization, and the way to do that is by improving the end-to-end business processes,” he writes.

Research indicates that organizations are unlikely to find a silver bullet. Employers have to engage in multifaceted and sometimes experimental approaches to the problem, approaches that take into consideration not only fast-changing technologies and new insights but also age-old wisdom about human beings.

Mark Vickers is senior research analyst for The Human Resource Institute. This article is published with approval of HRI. For more information, visit www.hrinstitute.info.

Gaining Team Consensus

Although consensus decision making usually takes longer to reach, the decisions typically receive more support because team members are all pulling in the same direction.

Here are five questions to ask yourself to assess your team’s readiness to reach a consensus:

1. Will all team members be able to think objectively? Members with hidden agendas can frustrate the process or produce a false consensus.
2. Do team members clearly understand the key issues and concerns behind the decision being considered? If in doubt, you might propose a preliminary Q&A session to help members grasp the importance of each item they’ll be asked to examine before a vote is taken.
3. Are members aware of all the circumstances and conditions that should influence their determination of priorities? For example, members may not understand the relative urgency of some tasks or realize how much time, budget money or resources they have at their disposal.
4. Will members be willing to reach a consensus on how to attack the various jobs? Before pursuing the decision making process, it’s important for group members to agree that they want to agree.
5. Are members willing to let the team’s or management’s concerns override any personal agendas?

If you can answer “yes” to these questions, then you can proceed to lead the group in making the decision about the best solution of many good solutions.

To better lead a project team in decision making, check out AMA’s seminars on project management at www.amanet.org/seminars



Here's what you'll find on the
AMA Members-only Website www.amamember.org

LEADERSHIP

It's About *Their* Passion...Not Just Yours.

Attention leaders: if you don't instill passion in your people, you're not truly leading. And, says Sander Flaum, you could end up losing some of your most valuable team members.

SMALL BUSINESS

Blogging Your Way to Business Success.

Blogs, or Weblogs, aren't just for "geeks" anymore. Businesses, large and small, are using them to create a powerful brand identity and to connect with customers. Here are 10 tips for getting started.

HR/TRAINING

Beyond the Automated Brain. This is your brain. This is your brain being replaced by a computer. Could it happen? Maybe not, but

there's no doubt that computers have had a radical effect on the occupational distribution of the U.S. workforce.

MANAGEMENT

Six Tips for Motivating Your Staff.

Are you unconsciously demotivating your people? To do optimal work, employees must know expectations, be well-trained, coached and rewarded when they get it right.

GLOBAL PERSPECTIVES

Preparing a Business for a Pandemic or Other Crisis.

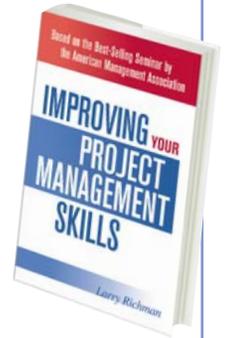
When it comes to crisis preparedness, companies should hope for the best and be prepared for the worst. Here are some strategies, including a crisis preparation checklist, to help maintain business continuity.

Book of the Month:

Improving Your Project Management Skills,

by Larry Richman, PMP (AMACOM 2006).

This must-have new book, based on the best-selling AMA seminar of the same name, covers all of the project management essentials—defining project scope, planning and budgeting, scheduling, implementation, project closure and more.



For more information about this book and AMACOM's extensive catalog of business titles, visit www.amanet.org/books.

AMA Conferences/Special Events Calendar

MAY 5, WASHINGTON, DC • AMA's Federal Learning Institute™ Leadership Excellence: Building Loyalty and Trust.

Federal employees can learn how to build trust and encourage highly motivated team performance through the application of Emotional Intelligence. Free.

MAY 17, WEBCAST • The Art of Effective Project Leadership.

Susan Junda and Andrew Boyarsky show how you can build team commitment and create a more predictable project environment. Free.

MAY 25, SAN FRANCISCO, CA • Executive Forum: Developing a Strong Partnering Organization.

Co-sponsored by AMA and Cisco Systems, this half-day afternoon program provides a roadmap to developing part-

nering as a core competency, with best practices, critical tools and processes, and people management issues discussed. AMA Executive Conference Center.

MAY 26, SAN FRANCISCO, CA • Executive Forum: Roadmap for Partnering Success.

Attend this half-day morning event, sponsored by AMA and Cisco Systems, on the critical tools and processes in partnering organizations. Learn how to build effective, virtual partnerships across functional lines and discuss Cisco's alliance manager tool kit. AMA Executive Conference Center.

JUNE 5-9, HILTON HEAD, SC • Course for Presidents.

Learn real-world strategies that you can use right now to address the toughest challenges.

JUNE 6-7, CHICAGO, IL • World Business Forum.

Be there for two days of the best business speakers, including William J. Clinton, Colin Powell, Michael Porter, Malcom Gladwell, Michelle Peluso, Kenichi Ohmae, Liu Jiren, Bruce Chizen, Rudy Giuliani, Marcus Buckingham and Dennis Nally.

JUNE 9, CHICAGO, IL • Executive Forum: Email & Instant Messaging Risks, Rules and Regulations.

Nancy Flynn, noted author and executive director of the ePolicy Institute, offers a half-day morning program that updates best practices and the new regulatory risks facing corporate executives. AMA Executive Conference Center.

Register online at www.amanet.org.

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Executive Matters
Member Newsletter
 May 2006 Issue

1601 Broadway
 New York, NY 10019-7420



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