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## Feedback For Sustainable Performance Improvement

If a leader's job was to just to keep employees happy, the job would be pretty easy, and just about anyone could be a successful leader.

However, the real world is quite different. Leaders are ultimately responsible to the organization, and often for, the organization and its results and outcomes. So, it stands to reason that effectively leading for sustainable performance improvement is an essential skill.



One of the key requirements for leading sustainable performance improvement is your ability to provide consistent and continuous feedback.

Research by behavioral specialists indicates that people are the most productive and have the best attitudes when they receive a balance of both positive and constructive feedback. The best way for a leader to ensure expectations are met is to develop a process and provide continuous feedback to every employee. A leader who wants to have a productive and committed work force needs to spend as much time catching people doing things right as they do catching people doing things wrong. Catching people doing things right and telling them about it has proven to be the best and the quickest way to ensure expectations are consistently being met.

Here is a simple 21-day strategy that you can use to make a dramatic and sustainable improvement in the performance of your team:

1. Select one or two specific behaviors you need to change within your area of responsibility.



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2. Write these behaviors on an index card or some other piece of paper that you can carry with you
  3. Look at the card or piece of paper every time to start to walk around and consciously observe your people.
  4. Each time you observe the right behavior take the time to immediately make a positive comment.
  5. For the first week, avoid making any negative or constructive comments if you observe someone not exhibiting the behavior you want, unless of course the observed behavior has an impact on safety, production, quality, etc.
  6. During the second and third weeks, continue to emphasize the positive, but also begin commenting when you do not see the desired behavior.
  7. Repeat the process as necessary.

If you do this regularly and consistently for three weeks, you will see a major change in performance.

For example, a hospital had experienced a number of staff injuries caused by falling on the stairs. As a result, a policy was instituted requiring staff to have one hand on the handrail at all times when using the stairs. This required a significant behavior change and management chose a strategy of positive reinforcement. In addition to reminder signs placed in the stairwells, everyone on staff was asked to give positive feedback to someone if they observed them using the handrail. Within three weeks, everyone in the hospital had developed the new habit of using the handrails. Ongoing positive reinforcement was able to change behavior much more quickly and with greater employee receptivity than a strategy focused on catching people not holding the handrail.

Let's face it, your people do many more good things every day than bad things. If it were otherwise they wouldn't be working for you. What are you doing to use that fact to provide the feedback necessary to help them do their best? Feedback is the key!

