

# Does performance management have to be painful?

When is the last time, as a people leader, you entered into the season of performance management with wide-eyed excitement? Does that sound ridiculous? I'm laughing even as I write it. Traditional performance management processes and tools are typically time-cycle driven, rating and ranking focused and arduous and tedious for managers and employees alike. Regardless of the characteristics of the manager/team member relationship, few welcome this time of year. Managers struggle to remember examples of their team member accomplishments and/or lack thereof. Team members similarly struggle to remember their own accomplishments and fear reporting any potential lacks in progress to the goals that were set during last year's cycle. These ingredients create an atmosphere in which the process is painfully ineffective and badly in need of a fresh approach.

## What makes performance management painful?

The once-a-year with a sometimes half year check-in approach simply does not work. Surely managers have more than two interactions with their team members over the course of a year! Ongoing and consistent check-in are essential to truly manage performance. I recently spoke to a manager of a team of 6 who said every year she spends a night up until 4am preparing for her annual performance reviews. Ironically, she's actually a great manager of people, is involved in each one of her team members' business, and coaches them quite well. So, what's keeping her up until 4am in preparation for her reviews? The system that her company has in place does not encourage revisiting progress until the dreaded review time so all of her great coaching goes unnoted and forgotten come review writing time. Additionally, the same phenomenon is true of her team members. They only interact with the system upon receiving their reviews, so although

some of the feedback they are receiving may have been delivered earlier in the year, they are now seeing it at a time that is irrelevant to what they are working on in the present moment.

## What is the solution?

First and foremost, there should be a tool in place for both managers and employees to document ongoing communication, coaching and feedback. It needs to be simple to access and use, have purpose, and incorporate day to day activities that team members are working on in conjunction with progress to annual goals. Additionally, there needs to be a mechanism in place to for goals and activities be revised. In the ever-changing landscape of business, it is rare that goals or priorities do not change or shift in priority throughout the year. To create annual goals, lock them in for the year, and then not document progress specific to them until the review writing season has opened is simply a waste of time for both the manager and employee. This rigid structure is the reason a manager is up until 4am, because the tool she has in place does not allow for goals to be adjusted in real time and does not encourage ongoing communication and progress capturing. Effective technology should enable and encourage transparency in goals and allow for them to be adjusted easily so they are always current and relevant. Additionally, it should empower both managers and employees to easily capture input, progress and feedback specific to goals, projects, competencies, behaviors, or other performance measures so that there is ongoing record of achievement throughout the year, not just at the end of the review cycle.

Finally, an effective system should allow for frequent assessments or measurements of performance to share throughout the year. An employee should have easy access to view a “snap shot” of how they are measuring up at any point during the year so that there is not a surprise come time for the annual review.

Goal setting angst, late night review writing and performance management pain is completely unnecessary. It simply takes the right system to be in place. To quickly evaluate if your system is creating performance management pain, ask yourself a few simple questions:

- Do managers and employees interact with it throughout the year?
- Does it allow goals to be easily modified in real time?
- Does it enable and encourage team collaboration and peer to peer interaction?
- Does it provide ongoing snapshots or assessments of overall performance and achievement at any time throughout the year?
- Does it save managers time by improving the flow of communication and easily capturing all of the relevant information needed for “annual” reviews?

If you answered no to more than one of these questions, it is likely time to start taking a look around to find a better solution and check out our next Blog entry – “We need better performance management technology, but where do we begin?”