

Ferdinand Fournies Management by Practicality

By Mark Cutshall

If you want to know how to get better results from your employees through improved work performance, you can hire a top-flight consultant-trainer . . . like Ferdinand Fournies. But if you just want to get your hands on his message and put his principled approach to work, get a copy of his bestselling book, *Coaching for Improved Work Performance*.

Solution: “After more than 20 years of studying, researching and teaching people management, it is obvious to me that management is more like bridge building than incantation. People management is a collection of interventions having a cause-and-effect relationship on employees.”

Fournies has put shoe leather to the problem: “In the first national study I conducted to analyze the effectiveness of management-performance-appraisal programs, most companies stated that the most important part of their appraisal program was the appraisal interview – the face to face meeting between the manager and the employee. When asked what was the weakest part of their appraisal program, most companies answered, *the face-to-face meeting between the manager and the employee.*”

For Fournies, the art of effective management coaching that can motivate employees, modify their behavior and increase performance begins with intervention, anchored in three basic facts about the manager’s role:

Fact No. 1 – Management is the intervention of getting things done through others

Fact No. 2 – You need your employees more than they need you

Fact No. 3 – You get paid for what your employees do, not what for what you do

Fournies drives his theory down a practical step-by-step path that’s so straightforward and appealing you want to know what’s around the next turn. Instead of theorizing about the coaching process, he lays out a five-step sequence:

Step 1 – Get his or her agreement that a problem exists

Step 2 – Mutually discuss alternative solutions

Step 3 – Mutually agree on action to be taken to solve problem

Step 4 – Follow up to measure results

Step 5 – Reinforce any achievement when it occurs

The payoff of such simplicity comes through conclusions such as this from Step 1: “There are only two categories of reasons that will convince a problem performer that there is a problem:

1. If the employee understands the results to your organization of what he or she is doing wrong or failing to do right
2. If the employee understands the consequences, if there is no change in performance”

Fournies' front-line research and professional longevity earn him the right to get in your face and deliver 10, bold "you must" admonitions — "Requirements for You to Be Successful in Eliminating Employees' Unsatisfactory Performance." It's a good dose of "count the cost" encouragement you need to put his plan to work.

Executives and managers committed to fulfilling the organization's mission have been searching for the solution to unmotivated, unproductive employees since the invention of the nap.

In his book, *Why Employees Don't Do What They're Supposed To Do and What To Do About It*, Fournies, plays off 25 years of research, including thousands of staff, manager and employee interviews with candid answers to the title.

Namely, there are 16 specific reasons for inappropriate performance. For instance, to unpack reason number seven, "There is No Positive Consequence to Them for Doing It," the author asks the manager/reader to consider these actual candid employee comments:

- "I worked late last night to finish a report, but when I gave it to my boss this morning, she didn't even look up from her desk."

- "Six months ago I gave my boss a suggestion for improving the process, and I haven't heard anything from him since then."

After explaining "the problem" by peeling back the "whys" of human behavior, Fournies offers a "preventive solution" to each of the 16 reasons. For number seven: "You must deliver 'rewards' as reinforcers for the performance you expect and pay for. . . ."

Such a "cook book" approach has the tendency to reduce human relationships to a set of ingredients, a cup of "don't forget," a teaspoon of "realize this," and dash of "should."

Chef Fournies took 15 years to bake the cake, then spent another 10 years in the kitchen and topped off the updated version with this cherry: "There are specific effective management interventions any manager can use to prevent almost all of those reasons why people don't do what they are supposed to do at work . . . We found

that many managers were already using these interventions effectively without knowing they were doing something special . . . The overwhelming conclusion is that management is an intervention more like bridge building than rain dancing; there is a direct cause-effect relationship between a manager's actions and an employee's performance."

Bottom line: You don't need to digest all 16 chapter-helpings to develop a taste for smart common-sense management actions. Just a few bites (and a side of appetizing conversation with your team) and you'll be hungry for more.

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