

Encourage the

5 Ways to Help Your Team Reach Unexpected Heights

By Pat MacMillan

As we look at faith-based organizations, we're constantly confronted with a pervading lack of money and human resources. Managers and leaders anguish over this dilemma. Most of the time they need the money because they need more people power. They need talented people who can help them achieve the goals God has given them.

Leaders feel they can't afford to hire in the first place, or can't afford to hire the people with the skills really necessary



to accomplish the job. Clearly, we have a talent shortage in virtually every ministry organization. Or do we?

If we worship such a big God, and these are the resources he has put into our stewardship, are we sure we don't have enough? One of our observations is that very frequently we *do* have enough people—often enough talented people. However, these people are not releasing their full potential.

This past year, I sat with a ministry leader wrestling with serious staffing needs, along with the pressures the organiza-

tion faced because of constituent needs and opportunities they couldn't pursue for the lack of enough talented people.

As we explored the situation, I commented that they appeared to have a sizable staff for a ministry of this type and scope. "It's not the size of my staff," he explained, "but rather the performance. In contrast to the community, we cannot pay competitive wages and therefore we don't have the needed skill levels to get the job done."

"How can you tell?" I asked.

“Results,” came the quick reply. “Our people cannot perform at the needed level.”

Over the next several hours, we identified a laundry list of issues that would drain the productivity of any organization. The list of issues was long. But five stand out that played the largest role in reducing staff performance. Here are five action steps that increased performance:

1. Have a clear definition of performance

In too many instances I find ministry leaders feel performance are less than what it should be, but are unclear about what the performance plumb line really looks like. In other instances, the leader is clear about performance standards, but the employees are not. Everyone has to be clear about what good performance looks like.

Look at the clarity of Paul’s description of performance standards as he speaks to the Colossians: “Conduct yourself with wisdom toward outsiders, making the most of the opportunity. Let your speech always be with grace, seasoned, as it were, with salt, so that you may know how you should respond to each person” (Colossians 4:5-6).

- Have performance standards been established and clearly communicated throughout your organization?
- Are both you and the employee clear about what are unacceptable/acceptable/exceptional levels of performance (standards, time frames, outcomes, etc.)?
- Are you confident that all staff members have an accurate understanding of what’s expected of them?
- Are the measures of job effectiveness based on specific goals and outcomes rather than the activities needed to achieve them?

2. Provide assessment and feedback

A clear definition of performance, in itself, is not sufficient. Often we find managers and leaders who don’t take the time to actually assess performance, provide feedback, and then coaching, on how to make it even better.

Improving unacceptable performance is mission-critical. But even good performance can be strengthened. However, neither will happen without

feedback. Paul acknowledged that the Thessalonians had great performance in the way they loved their brothers, but in the midst of paying them that compliment, he challenged them to “excel still more” (1 Thessalonians 4:9:10).

Lack of time and avoiding conflict are two common reasons we fail to provide assessment and feedback.

There’s also the issue of spiritual confusion. At what point is my assessment and feedback judging or unedifying? (What’s key here is the motive and manner of feedback, not the feedback itself.)

3. Make sure skill fits the position

Measuring performance answers the question: *Are they performing?* If the answer is no, then we’re confronted with another question: *Why not?*

Invariably, the first thought that comes to mind when we see someone who’s not performing is the matter of skill. I encourage managers to ask the following questions when assessing the skill-fit between an individual and a specific position:

- What are the expected goals or outcomes?
- What activities are needed to achieve those goals?
- What skills are needed to effectively execute those activities?
- To what extent does this person possess the needed skills?
- If the skills are inadequate or lacking, do we have the time and capacity to help this individual develop a needed skill level to be successful? And, would these resources make a difference if applied?

Asking these questions in this sequence gives managers tremendous insight into the skill-fit of a particular individual. And, just as importantly, you’ll see if your organization has the resources, time and capacity to help this person achieve the needed skill level in an acceptable amount of time. If not, we need to find a position that better fits the current skill level or help him or her develop the needed skills.

4. Develop commitment and willingness

All of us have seen individuals who clearly have the skills to perform at exceptional levels, but aren’t due to lack of commitment. This could stem from

several sources – lack of alignment to the organization’s mission and vision, lack of interest in the work activities themselves, a feeling they’re putting more into the job than they’re taking out, life/work conflicts and others.

No level of competency will override the smallest lack of commitment. If you can’t resolve this commitment gap, these individuals need to find a position (in or out of the organization) in which they can bring commitment, passion and willingness to their work.

Lastly, don’t overlook the spiritual dimension of call. It’s sobering how often I run into people who feel called to a certain position but have no commitment for doing the work in that position. In some cases, this is because they don’t have a clear line of sight between day-to-day activities and the overall ministry impact. As leaders, we need to make sure that connection is clear to everyone, removing barriers as we discover them.

5. Capable leadership is key

Teams with effective leadership typically perform beyond expectations.

If leaders help team members release their untapped capacity, they’d find they have enough talent to get the job done and done well.

One research study found that hourly workers can maintain their jobs by working 20 percent to 30 percent of their ability, whereas highly motivated employees work at 90 percent.¹

So, why aren’t people performing at the levels we’d hope for? In many cases, it’s because people hold a large part of their potential performance in reserve. Why don’t they just release that potential? It might be a leadership problem.

As leaders, we must lead in such a way that our people want to leave nothing on the table – hold nothing in reserve. We must ensure that we lead our organizations one person at a time making certain each and every staff member understands why his or her job is relevant, significant, and urgently needed in order for us to achieve the goals God has given us.

In my book, *Hiring Excellence*, I noted that some experts believe a single, exceptional employee can accomplish as much or more work than that of three

marginal employees. In many instances, we can define the difference between these two types of employees by how much capacity they're releasing. The exceptional employees release nearly all their internal capacity against the work to be done, whereas marginal employees hold back anything beyond acceptable performance. As a manager, I can't *command* that they release this untapped potential as long as they're achieving acceptable levels of performance. Rather, I must *call out* higher levels of commitment and convince them to *voluntarily* release that capacity.

In some respects, the leader has to help staff members change their mindset from that of employees to being "volunteers" or, even better yet, owners. They voluntarily release extra levels of creativity, initiative and an effort leading

to exceptional levels of performance.

In some very special cases, leaders can inspire employees to go beyond "volunteers" to owners – owners, in the sense that they "own" the objectives. They demonstrate initiative and take personal responsibility for achieving organizational goals. In this setting, you have front-line employees acting like CEOs. They become chief executive officers of their area of responsibility. In fact, a good leader wants everybody in the organization to think like a CEO. For example, do you have a CEO of shipping, or of fundraising?

In a faith-based organization, a good manager will connect what an employee is doing with goals God has given the ministry.

I've found when people understand that they're really CEOs of their area,

they have a higher level of commitment. We've got to lead in such a way that people want to hold nothing in reserve. To achieve such a high-level of output, this means defining performance, assessing performance and releasing performance. By incorporating these steps, you may find your ministry has the talent it needs to accomplish extraordinary things for God.

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¹ Harold Koontz & Cyril O'Donnell

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