

3-Card Monte, Roulette, And Other Ineffective Performance Management Strategies

Stacking The Odds In Your Favor

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Street hustling requires a quick tongue and an even quicker hand. Amazingly, the sleight of hand and speech employed by the 3-card monte professional pales in comparison to the ambiguous, erratic, and unsubstantiated rhetoric permeating so many organizational cultures masquerading as performance management. While street corner audiences may be amused by the masterful misdirection and mystery that accompanies that famous card trick, rest assured your associates are not amused in the least when it comes to ineffective performance management practices and systems.

Performance management is integral to the success of any organization; unfortunately, many direct reports feel they have better odds in Vegas playing keno, roulette or craps, than receiving timely and thorough feedback regarding their past performance and the pathway to more significant contributions in the future.

Suffice it to say that the ever popular and ubiquitous “no news is good news” approach to performance management is ineffective, irrational, irresponsible, and annoying. Very few leaders would feel comfortable with their immediate supervisor utilizing that asinine approach, yet those same leaders enlist their own team members in an unpredictable game of chance – maybe performance improves. Maybe it won’t!

In Vegas, it is no secret the odds are stacked in the house’s favor. The “professionals” routinely cite that of each dollar wagered playing keno, the casino keeps 30%. In roulette, the game isn’t really about red or black, it’s all about the green. The casino gives itself a 5.25% edge. And to no one’s surprise, the odds at the craps table hover around 1.4% in favor of the house.

In the process of managing performance, the odds should be stacked in the associate’s favor. Clearly, the leader wants the associate to perform to, if not, exceed expectations. Strangely, one of the key tactics in getting direct reports to perform, consistently, at high levels is the leader’s investment in an ongoing performance management dialogue. Given how important this dialogue is to great performance, why then are so many leaders so derelict in initiating and facilitating them? Perhaps the answer is in developing the proper framework and a dogged commitment to follow-through.

Below are 5 performance management techniques to make sure the odds are overwhelmingly stacked in your favor:

Ensure Everyone Knows The System. One of the most common laments I hear from direct reports is that they don’t understand their organizations performance management system. The truth is, it’s hard for your direct reports to respect and embrace a system they don’t understand. While safety and ethics training are a priority, don’t forget to educate and re-educate your team members on the performance management system. During that education, be sure to highlight the intent and benefits of the system. Even consider having your top performers share with new team members the benefits of the system.

Standards Are Sovereign. Don’t compare associates to each other; compare them to the standard. The measure of success is not how much better Mary is at the job than Marcus. The

The question is how do they meet, exceed or fall short of the performance expectation. How does it benefit the organization if neither associate meets or exceeds the performance standard? Of course, it doesn't. The real key to overall organizational effectiveness and profitability is in evaluating each associate against the pre-established, and agreed upon, performance standard.

When Possible, Show Them What Success Looks Like. As you have heard, and probably know from experience, a picture can be worth 1000 words. Showing your direct reports what top performance looks like will allow them to align their output with your expectation. The power of modeling can't be underestimated. As the old adage goes, if they can see it, they can do it.

Communicate The Expectations – Often. Why do companies pay to have the same commercial air over and over and over again in a 30-minute window? Simple, we aren't really paying attention. Make sure you revisit your expectation of your associates. Just because you covered your expectation of quality, quantity and timing with them once in January, doesn't mean those expectations are particularly front of mind in April.

Formal performance management meetings should be a review, never a surprise.

Perhaps you remember the old television commercial where the rabbit proclaims, "Trixx are for kids." Well, surprises during a performance are like dealing from the bottom of the deck – a reality dirty trick. The formal meeting is a chance to review and summarize prior informal and impromptu conversations, not an opportunity to dump months of "data." If you're waiting until the formal meeting to provide your insights and observations, I assure you, you'll be waiting even longer to see any significant improvement performance.

Not Everyone Is Right For Every Job, And Not Every Job Right For Everybody. In the final analysis, this axiom is paramount. Poor performance generally boils down to two sources – ability or attitude. If either remains unacceptable after education, training and coaching, then it is time to assist that associate in finding a better match of their talents to tasks. As the old HR saying goes, "Help them go where they can grow!"

A highly effective performance management system is fundamental to the success of a leader and to the success of the organization. Take the time to invest in yours before your luck runs out!

Leadership Lesson: Leaders not only help associates see what's possible, but they help those same associates understand how their performance compares against an objective standard and what needs to happen to get better. The performance management conversation has to become a staple in the culture. If your performance management system is comparable to a Vegas crap game, where you're hoping, wishing and praying you'll get luck, odds are you'll end up with crappy performance. Put the odds of great performance on your side.

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