

THE CHALLENGE: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT

- Haphazard staff management. Managers not accountable for helping staff perform.
- Junior employees deep dislike of a system that gave no feedback or feedback one year late.
- Deep mistrust of promotion, career growth, or pay raise process.
- Expensive and poorly used IT solution.
- Performance conversation format completely disconnected from workplace culture, style of work, and employee needs.
- Little to no interest in participating in career growth activities, because it “didn’t matter.”

THE TECHNIQUE: PERFORMANCE MANAGEMENT REVAMP

- Switch from an annual performance rating, with a numeric assessment of a full year’s worth of work, to a quarterly coaching conversation focusing on current projects, employee growth, and learning.
- Train all managers on coaching staff: giving feedback, promoting growth, and hearing from employees.
- Shorten coaching conversation format from 22 questions to 5.
- Leave contract for IT platform, saving \$25,000 annually.
- Re-align training calendar to offer courses directly prior to quarterly coaching conversation and directly after.
- Strategically target key staff who are at-risk of leaving with special projects or assignments in each coaching quarterly session.

THE INTERVENTION

- Developed an internal style guide on holding coaching conversations and held managers accountable for conducting conversations.
- Used both “carrot” and “stick” to enforce participation: senior leadership communicated both by message and example that every staff member would have a conversation. At the same time, created a celebratory atmosphere with fun treats, posters, and themes based on the season.
- Kept overall time investment for managers at a similar level with conversations shorter than previous 22-question format.
- Demonstrated continuity and follow-through (unusual for this organization).

THE RESULTS

- Created a first step in holding managers accountable.
- Improved performance management from 15–20% participation to 80% in first year of intervention.
- Increased training participation to 40% higher enrollment after 6 months.
- Changed culture by improving employee trust that there would be follow through on a career conversation.
- Shifted perception of performance management to being more modern, responsive, and aligned with how actual work was performed.
- Enabled Human Resources to review employee requests, adapt training calendar, and respond individually to requests. Also reviewed documentation of Kirkpatrick Level 3 data to assess how managers were applying the program and what skill gaps existed.
- Created connection between performance conversations, learning and growth opportunities, and career development where previously little to none existed.