THE Farr FACTOR VAULT

HR Department Toolkit

Coaching and Counseling to Reinforce and Redirect Employee Performance

Part 1

POWER
GROUP COMPANY
MARKETING AND MANAGEMENT SOLUTIONS

So often in today's retail store management environment, store managers and owner's actions, when facing poor employee performances, fall into one of two camps: do nothing until you are ready to explode at troublesome workers, or "write 'em up" with formalized warnings of imminent terminations. But there is another action you should take before you bury an employee with intimidating paperwork and that is one-on-one performance counseling.

A 6-step Coaching Approach
As a summary, it is to:

1. Gather and verify the performance issues information and decide if proceeding is worth your time or with hassling the employee. Act on facts, not on rumors or suppositions.

2. Meet with the employee and get agreement on what's happened or what hasn't happened (see step 1).

3. Get agreement on whose problem it really is. It's both yours and the employee's because of your limited management choices for action that includes them, which helps their compliance.

4. Ask for solutions. It's important for the employee to not only recognize that it is their problem but that they also have to except the responsibility of creating potential solutions for their problem.

5. Evaluate the problem's potential solutions; agree on the best alternative and then on what will happen and when.

6. Monitor progress and give feedback to additionally correct and/or to reinforce.

But before you can even begin to understand the process, consider why employees don't do what they're supposed to do in the first place. Human nature is that employees do or think to do what is rational to them and that is, for the most part, like all human beings they will seek pleasure and avoid pain. They don't do illogical things on purpose. Now as a manager of a retail salon, you are not required to be an amateur psychologist. However, you are paid to modify the work-related behavior you can control. And to do that a good rule of thumb is that when you reinforce positive actions, usually they'll be repeated. Actions such as getting to work on time, helping customers buy products or services with a pleasant attitude might all be taken for granted. Your workers need to know that you appreciate their positive <u>efforts</u>, <u>not</u> just major accomplishments. And most important, accept the belief that employees do not intentionally decide to do bad work or to irritate you, although that may seem like the case at times.

There are other attitude adjustments or considerations for your performance management approach and they are:

- Have they had proper training?

- Is the correction of their performance controllable by the employee? Asking someone to handle an irate customer when they don't have the authority to negotiate with the customer is not a logical request.

This tool is divided into two parts. The first is to discuss a system or procedure you can use to solve performance problems. The second part deals with learning techniques you can use when talking with an employee about resolving the problems.

There are five reasons why most performance problems occur:

1. An employee doesn't know how to do the job (lack of training).

2. An employee doesn't know to what standard (i.e., minimum average sale per tanner visit, never late to work, or late only twice per year, etc.) to perform it.

3. Something in the work environment prevents the employee from doing work (i.e., too many interruptions, lack of equipment) peer problems etc.

4. The consequences or rewards for doing the behavior are either negative or nonexistent. (i.e., "I finished all of my work and then I'm given someone else's work to do, or some worker doesn't finish because they spend much of their shift talking to their friends").

5. There is no feedback given about the performance consequences (i.e., the employee thinks they are doing their job correctly because their manager doesn't tell them differently when in reality, they are not. Or, an employee is doing something they shouldn't, such as consistently arriving for their shift late but they don't realize the impact this has on the salon. One recent productivity study indicated that up to 50% of the performance problems are related to not receiving feedback or receiving insufficient feedback.

The system to use for solving performance problems is often referred to as performance management. It is composed of four components: antecedents, behaviors, consequences and feedback, or the ABC&F System

When we have a problem with an employee, we identify a behavior that the employee is or is not doing that we don't like. It is a behavior we want to stop or increase. In order to find out why the problem is occurring, we need to examine the antecedents, behaviors, consequences, and feedback system.

First we need to specifically define the behavior we want to stop. When defining the behavior, use behavioral descriptions. Avoid using opinion statements. Use terms you can see, hear, count, or measure.

Don't act on rumors or suppositions. The more defined the errant performance is, the better and easier will be the potential employee's correction.

You need to ask yourself questions about the goals you set for employees. Can the behavior or performance be performed? In other words, can the employee do the work? Does anything prevent the employee from doing what's asked of them?

This is a key step. If you can answer "yes" to all of these questions, then you know the problem isn't with the behavior required. You then need to examine the consequences and feedback system.

If you answer "no" to the first question, chances are that the employee was not properly trained. Rather than spend time altering the consequences or feedback, spend time training the individual. If you answer "no" to the second question, transfer or termination might be choices to consider.

If you answer, "yes" to the third question, you, as the employee's manager, need to provide the employee with what is missing or you can't realistically expect her/her to do the job.

Please look at the above questions again. You may want to think the people in your salon were obviously hired on the basis of their ability to perform. Either they have had similar past experience or they have been trained to do the tasks in question. The fatal assumption here is that training equals learning. It IS ENTIRELY possible that the employee has not been given adequate instruction relating to the task, or that the instructions or expectations were not completely understood. Further, watching a task being done is very different from doing it yourself. Review your orientation and training programs, devise checklists, pre- and post-tests and ask the employee to explain their understanding of the task or expectation in question. In other words, make certain that people actually know what they are expected to do. Many performance problems are solved at this juncture because lack of quality communications and understanding are most often at the root of performance issues.

If, however, you find no problems with these areas, you are then ready to move on.

Be careful of assumptions. I often find that managers assume that employees know and understand the standards when they have no idea that standards even exist.

For example, let's say that I clearly remember telling the employee the standards when I hired them. How do I know that they understood them? Did I have them repeat them back to me? Or did I make the assumption they understood because they simply nodded their head? They may have done so because they were afraid to ask a question and didn't want to appear dumb.

Do they agree with the standards? Do they think the standards are realistic or foolish? Again, how do you know? Are you making any assumptions?

Do they know why it is important to meet the standards? Do they realize that if they spend more time on their cell phone with personal calls their work won't get done which means your salon won't be able to meet its crucial sales goals? Or do they think the sales goals are just some arbitrary standard you have set?

Are your standards or goals realistic or are you asking too much?

What seems to trigger the lack of performance behavior? What causes them to make and make more personal calls than they should? Do they have too light of a workload? Too little feedback from you?

As the manager or manager you must be a problem solver. You must carefully analyze the situation to determine how to resolve the problem and improve performance. These questions will help you do so.

But, let's say you examined all of the above and you just can't locate where management was part of the problem. Or, let's say you correct the problem (i.e., explain standards more thoroughly, retrain, etc.) and the problem still doesn't improve. Then it's time to look at the consequences.

If the consequences, or re-enforcers, for a behavior seem to be happy consequences, people tend to repeat the behavior. These are called positive consequences. If the consequences bring unhappiness (manager yells, decrease in pay, cuts work hours, etc.) people tend to avoid the behavior in the future. These are called negative consequences. If there are no apparent positive consequences to a behavior, people will or may gradually stop doing it.

Here's an example of how consequences work. If you thought your very first cigarette tasted good, you will probably smoke another. Tasting good is a positive consequence. If it tastes awful or causes a lot of coughing and choking, you will tend not to try another. The bad taste or coughing are negative consequences. If it doesn't do much of anything for your taste buds, you will maybe smoke intermittently, but not necessarily form a habit.

What would you think would happen, if when you smoked your first cigarette and it tasted awful and made you cough and choke, but leaders that you see and hear every day said "All successful business people smoke" or "I admire a man/woman who smokes – they always seem brighter than their counterparts" or commercials that seem to say; "Smoking makes you more appealing, more sophisticated, etc." You might repeat the behavior regardless of the taste, choking or coughing. All of the above comments may positively reinforce someone to continue smoking.

Now, ask yourself, what kind of consequence – positive or negative – an employee receives for doing, or not doing, the task in question. For example, if employee "A" is a particularly fast worker, are they rewarded for their efficiency by getting more work to do than slower-moving colleagues? If so, employee "A's" productivity may eventually start to fall because the consequence of that behavior is simply more work transferred to them from someone not doing their share of the tasks. If you do recognize that such a negative consequence for positive behavior exists, try to replace it with a positive one, e.g., a job quickly and accurately done merits better selling hours or allowing the employee to leave work ½ hour early with pay.

Also ask yourself if positive consequence (from the worker's point of view) can result from non-performance? For example, if employee "A" is often late to their shift, they may find the consequences to be rather positive:

- They get to sleep late more often.
- Tough tasks are assigned to other, more reliable co-workers.
- They're not fired nor do they get a meaningful reprimand.
- The boss pays a lot of attention to them by asking how things are going at home, or "what can the boss do to help the employee get to work when scheduled?" etc.

All these consequences reinforce their high rate of absenteeism. If you believe non-performance is in some subtle way being rewarded, you should intervene to change that reinforcement.

It is important to remember that what positively reinforces one person may not reinforce another. For example, if the President of the United States told someone "All successful business people smoke," that may reinforce that person because he may admire the President and wants to be a successful businessperson. It may have the opposite effect on someone else who dislikes the President.

We need to remember, when thinking about consequences, that what may positively or negatively reinforce us as managers may have little or no effect on the people we manage. this statement is very important for managers to remember and is something we often forget. People are different and react differently to different sets of consequences.

In analyzing the job behavior of employees, you must look at the <u>consequences to the individual</u> of the behavior, as that individual perceives them, not as you, their peers, colleagues, co-workers, friends, relatives or neighbors perceive them.

Analyze the consequences carefully. If an employee is repeating a behavior you don't like – even after you have told them of your standards of performance or behavior– something is positively rewarding them to do so. If an employee is receiving positive consequences from performing a behavior you don't like, he/she will continue doing so until you change the consequence.

Let's consider our personal phone call example again. Let's say that the positive consequence, or reward of making a personal phone call is being the first one in the salon with juicy gossip. The employee makes the call and then another other employee stands near her to hear the details. The employee is the star as she relates the story and is the center of everyone's attention. this is most often the objective of those who spend an inordinate time gossiping. Those are the positive consequences. There are no negative ones if the manager never says or does anything about the personal phone call or gossip time. The manager allows the behavior to continue and it will, even though the employee knows the standards or rules of performance and behavior.

Positive or negative consequences given immediately after the behavior occurs will affect the behavior much more than if they are given days or weeks later.

For example, if I wait to say something about the phone calls to the employee at their performance review, which is 6 months from now, that will do little to stop the behavior. However, if I say something of a redirection nature immediately after she hangs up the phone, I'll have a greater chance of being able to stop the behavior.

A manager needs to give employees feedback about the consequences of their actions. this feedback is something that will trigger, or continue to trigger the appropriate behavior. The feedback is new information that has the potential to change the employee's behavior.

Let's review what you should do when you're using this process. First, identify the unsatisfactory performance – what the employee is doing or not doing to cause some unsatisfactory results such as late work arrivals, complaints from customers or other people in the company/salon etc.

After identifying the behavior that is causing a performance problem, you need to ask if the employee can actually do the behavior we're asking of them. In other words, you need to make sure employees know how to do what they're expected to do.

Assuming that the employee has the information, training and freedom needed to do the task, the next question is: Are there obstacles to satisfactorily performing those tasks that are beyond the employee's control? Some examples are:

- Non-availability of merchandise, materials or resources needed to do the job
- Unfinished pre-work where another employee left a project incomplete (messy salon from the night or shift before) making the tasks achievement that much more difficult
- Equipment or technical failures
- Conflicting instructions or demands on time from multiple managers or projects.

If the answer is yes, there are obstacles beyond employee's control. Your role as the manager is to remove the obstacles if you can.

At this point, the problem is really yours and not the employees.

If there are no obstacles or the obstacles are within the employee's control, you can move to the next part of the analysis – the antecedents.

These are things that trigger an inappropriate performance of the employee. Ask yourself, are the employee's reports late because he:

- Doesn't start them on time?
- Wastes time talking with co-workers?
- Hasn't set priorities?
- Is absent from work too often?
- Doesn't know or understand the standard?

You can identify what is wrong with the antecedents – if anything, by:

- Observation
- Information from co-workers
- Information from the employee

If there are no problems with the antecedents, look at the consequences. As we said, all behavior is a function of its set of consequences, positive or negative. Positive consequences cause an increase in behavior. If we administer positive consequences, we will see the behavior repeated more often.

The last area we look at is feedback. Is the employee aware that her performance is not up to your performance standards or to the rules? Often, employees think they are doing what they're supposed to do; or, if they know they're not doing something they should, they don't realize the significance of the task. Thus an employee who violates a confidence may not have realized the information was confidential; or, someone who fails to turn in a weekly report

thinks the report is "just for the file – no one ever reads it" or someone who does not show up for their shift feels that: "It's only a half an hour, the salon can handle that".

Up to this point, we have been talking about using the ABC&F approach to eliminate a negative behavior. The ABC&F approach can also be used to increase a positive behavior. Let's say that one of the people you supervise completes her work on time. To make sure they continue to do so, you want to make sure that they receive positive consequences for doing so.

What are some positive consequences that you, their manager, can give them? There is a difference between short range, and immediate, and long-range consequences. For example, an immediate positive consequence is having the manager thank the employee daily for completing her work on time. (Simple "thankyous" can be quite effective if they are sincere). A long-range consequence is making a positive statement about their timeliness on their performance appraisal, but if only long-range consequences are given, chances are that behavior will not continue. Positive behaviors and attitudes need more timely and frequent reinforcement.

In this section we'll discuss how you talk with an employee who is having a problem. You can use these procedures with a person who has made a substandard effort and with an employee who repeatedly violates a salon rule that causes disturbances among other personnel or lowers production through some form of unacceptable behavior.

Employees usually don't become problems overnight. Problems develop in a progressive or gradual way and often begin with small and seemingly insignificant situational changes in behavior. As we have discussed before, it is important for a manager to notice these insignificant changes in behavior and act. None of these problems "go away" on their own accord. If allowed to continue, they frequently become worse.

What are some red flags that signal you that an employee may be beginning to have a problem?

- Employee who is normally responsive to a manager all of a sudden is not
- Carelessness in work
- Disinterest in work
- Complaints from other workers
- Defensive or hostile behavior
- Hypochondriac like behavior
- Non-medical absences
- Tardiness
- Inability to accept criticism
- Accidents or costly mistakes or even minor redirections in their activities
- Lower quality of sales performance
- Decrease in quantity of work accomplished
- Poor grooming or appearance
- Withdrawal from socializing
- Avoidance at taking on additional work
- Perceived increase in the consumption of food, tobacco or alcohol

- Decrease in initiatives

While any of these could be dismissed as "having a bad day", assuming they occur on an isolated basis, a significant change, or a change that lasts several days, could forecast more serious and recurring problems later on if ignored now.

The task facing any manager is determining an appropriate reaction to events that, on the surface, appear to require no real reaction. Sometimes, you might just want to show supportiveness or concern. At other times, you may want to give a reprimand or engage the employee in a coaching session.

When you are going to discuss a problem with an employee, **remember the four R's of coaching: the right purpose, the right place, the right time and the right techniques.**

We have already listed some of the right purposes. Basically, a manager should intervene when an employee does something that threatens to decrease productivity in their salon. The manager should not intervene with the purpose of prying into employees' lives or for other non-business purposes. Remember, as much as you may want to help an individual, you are not a trained therapist or counselor. **It's good to be empathetic, to show understanding of the employee's problems. But being sympathetic, too often leads to managers taking on the ownership of the employee's problems.**

Having the right place for private communication can be more important than you think. It's almost impossible to do a successful stand-up coaching session or to accomplish much in a noisy place where there are frequent distractions. The ideal situation, of course, is a private office. Some managers, however, must settle for less. One alternative is to make arrangements to use somebody else's office, a vacant room, the private dining area of a family style or casual eating restaurant etc.

Because **coaching is always a sensitive process,** the **timing** (usually under the control of manager) is **vitally important to a successful outcome**. If the timing is right, the results can be excellent. If the timing is wrong, little may be accomplished.

Here are **three suggestions that should help you choose the right time:**

1. **Don't initiate a coaching session when you are upset, frustrated, or angry.** Remember – coaching is a two-way affair, and if you use that opportunity to get rid of some inner hostility for the employee or hostility you have somewhere else in your life, it may detract from any chance of a successful session.

2. **Certain times of the day are not conductive to effective coaching.** Peak activity periods, just before lunch, and just before the end of the day (when employees may be anxious to get home or meet appointments) or before an anticipated heavy flow of customers are not the most suitable. Also, try to avoid a period when the employee may be upset emotionally due to some out of work place personal issue unless the cause of the upset is the reason for the coaching.

3. **Do not set up a coaching session too far in advance.** If you invite an employee to meet you in your office at 2:00 p.m. when it is only 10:00 a.m., he or she has four

hours to worry and get upset and probably will produce at a lower rate. In almost any case it is better to set a time with either a short gap or none at all.

Conducting the Coaching and Counseling Session

The procedures I'll discuss in this section are <u>not</u> part of a formal disciplinary process (i.e. oral warning, written warning, suspension, termination.) Often, this occurs before a formal disciplinary process is initiated. However, they can be used with an employee at any time. For minor or first-time infractions, it may be best to mention the issue **"sandwiched"** between other comments of positive performances. It feels fair to the employee because it zeroes in on one behavior at a time and reinforces the employee's worth as a person and as a usually good performer. It tells your employee that you think well of them as a person, but not the specific behavior you have observed.

What you will do depends on your assessment of how serious the problem is. Going forward is the procedure of a formalized coaching/counseling session where we'll assume the employee's performance issues are of a more serious or disruptive nature and must be dealt with more directly. **Managers tend to avoid this kind of coaching discussion because:**

- They don't know how to conduct them

- They are afraid things will be said that will destroy a satisfactory relationship they have with an employee. In other words, they worry about encountering hostility, defensiveness, etc.

- They don't think anything positive will happen as a result of the discussion.

- They don't want to take the time because they may be of the mistaken notion that if they forget or avoid the issue for a while it may work itself out. Serious employee performance issues rarely go away by themselves.

The corrective coaching procedure we will discuss will help with the first two points. If you follow it, I think you will find the discussions do produce a change in employees.

The procedure includes six steps:

1. Gather and verify the performance issues information and decide if proceeding is worth your time or with hassling the employee. Act on facts, not on rumors or suppositions.

2. Meet with the employee and get agreement on what's happened or what hasn't happened (see step 1).

3. Get agreement on whose problem it really is. It's both yours and the employee's because of your limited management choices for action that includes them, which helps their compliance.

4. Ask for solutions. It's important for the employee to not only recognize that it is their problem but that they also have to except the responsibility of creating potential solutions for <u>their</u> problem.

5.   Evaluate the problem's potential solutions; agree on the best alternative and then on what will happen and when.

6.   Monitor progress and give feedback to additionally correct and/or to reinforce.

For an example of a coaching / counseling interview, see Part 2