

## **Do Your Managers Have the Skills to Increase Employee Performance?**

Last month I discussed the impact of a manager's behaviour on employee productivity... primarily through the environment they create. This month I want to look at the specific skills that managers need to turn a poor performer into an acceptable one, or an average performer into a highly productive one.

There are two things you have to achieve before you can get anyone to improve their performance. They must first agree that there is a need to improve performance, and secondly be willing to make the effort to improve.

What typically happens when someone is not performing up to expectations is that they get *criticized!* The usual result of criticism is that people react defensively, either by rejecting what they are being told, or to avoid the person criticizing them. Yes there are some people who respond to criticism by doing what they are expected to do... but how willingly do they do it, and how much residual resentment will be there in the future. Are you going to get the best performance out of this person?

The two skills that managers need to improve employee performance are *counselling* and *coaching*.

*Counselling* is the skill of getting the employee to understand the present situation and agree that there is a need to improve performance. It involves discussing behaviour, attitudes and beliefs that may be causing problems, or preventing performance from being improved. Only when the employee understands and accepts that there is a need to improve, can we get their agreement to do so.

*Coaching* begins when we have that agreement, and involves discussing strategies, making decisions, developing skills and knowledge and setting goals and time frames.

To help the employee to understand the difference between current behaviour and what is expected, you must give specific examples of what has been happening, using

facts. For example, instead of “You always arrive late for work”, be specific: “You have been late for work three times this week.” It is also more effective to clarify your expectations with a question: “Is there any reason why I should not expect to see you at work every day?”

### **Understanding Negative Consequences**

Most people who persistently arrive late for work, or only get sick for one day on a Monday, usually don't see it as a big deal. They have not thought through any potential negative consequences.