

## Chapter 1

---

# Set Expectations to Avoid Performance Issues

---

*“An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure.”*

As our research and our work has told us, many performance issues result from the lack of understanding of performance expectations or the lack of clarity of those expectations. Without a clear target, it is impossible for employees to know where and for what to aim. On the flip side, their managers should not be able to hold them accountable without these same measures or tools.

Leaders need to build a performance-based team whose objectives are consistent with the organization’s vision and mission.

## CREATING TEAMS

The synergy that comes from putting employees together to form teams to solve problems, make decisions, and take action is power that organizations can harness for greater success. In these increasingly complex, changing times for your business, using the principles of teams can supply more creative solutions and more powerful support for your teams and the organization as a whole. With an effective team, “The whole is greater than the sum of its parts.”

Creating teams and leading them to success require skill and finesse on the part of the team leaders. We discuss and provide practice for

the skills that can help make you successful in creating a good team environment.

*Teamwork* is the ability of people to work together toward a common vision. It is the ability to direct individual accomplishment toward organizational objectives, and it is the fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results.

### WHAT DOES A TEAM LOOK LIKE?

To help you determine whether you have a team or just a group of individuals, consider the following questions:

- How do you make decisions?
- How do you deal with conflicts?
- How do you solve problems?
- What happens when things go wrong?
- How do you build a team that makes effective decisions, surfaces and manages conflicts, and works together to solve problems and handle issues?

### BUILDING THE VISION

At the center of every high-performance team is a common purpose, a mission that rises above and beyond each of the individual team members. To be successful, the team's interests and needs must come first. This requires, "we-opic" vision ("What's in it for 'we'?"). A challenging step up from the common, "me-opic" mindset.

To embrace this principle, make sure your team purpose and priorities are clear. What is your overall mission? What is your game plan? What is expected of each team member? How can each member contribute most effectively? What constants will hold the team together? Then stop and ask yourself whether you are putting the team first.

In order to develop successful plans, it is necessary for managers both to understand their organization's strategic vision and to

incorporate that vision into their plans and day-to-day operations. To accomplish this, consider the following steps:

1. Become comfortable articulating your organization's vision and strategic direction. To clarify and increase your understanding in this area, ask yourself questions such as:
  - What is the organization's strategic vision?
  - What does the strategic vision mean for me and my department?
  - What are the future opportunities?
  - What talents and resources will I need to accomplish my part?
2. Ask for whatever information you need to understand the strategy and direction.
3. Link your operational plans with the organization's vision and strategic direction.
4. Plan for ongoing review and updates to ensure that your departmental plans support your organization's strategic vision.

**Company's Vision/Strategy**

**Write your vision here:**

---



---



---



---



---



---



---

If you are unclear about your company's vision, you can get more information by:

- Reading the annual report.
- Attending company meetings, such as town meetings, and reading quarterly updates, newsletters, and press releases.
- Talking with members of the management team.
- Reviewing annual objectives.

### Your Team's Vision

What is the vision for your current team? What is the purpose of the team? How does your vision fit into the company's overall vision and strategy?

<b>Team Vision:</b> Write your team vision here:
<b>Purpose of Team:</b> Write your team purpose here:
<b>How Does the Team Vision Fit into the Company's Vision/Strategy?</b>

### MAKING THE VISION HAPPEN

Now that you have established your vision, established clear expectations for each team member, and assessed the strengths and weaknesses of your team, it is time to implement the vision and make it

happen. The first step in making it happen is communicating the vision and keeping it alive. Use the following worksheet to develop your communication plan.

<b>Team Vision</b>			
<b>Team Member</b>	<b>Key Responsibilities</b>	<b>Skills and Abilities</b>	<b>Rewards</b>

## **COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE**

The communication process can also be thought of as a public relations initiative. As we learn in the case studies in Chapter 8, the team’s purpose and vision not only needs to be communicated to the team members, but they also need to be communicated to the rest of the organization, particularly those functions with which the teams will be working closely.

## STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH YOUR TEAM

Many leaders are focused on tasks, results, and projects. While these items are important, leaders must also take the time to communicate with their teams. Effectively communicating with team members increases productivity and minimizes confusion and wasted effort. The following strategies outline opportunities for leaders to communicate with their teams.

- Hold regular staff meetings:
  - Make these important meetings a priority.
  - Plan an agenda, allowing for changes when needed.
  - Include a development activity on a regular basis.
- Keep formal department documents up to date, such as:
  - Organizational charts
  - Department vision
  - Management by objectives (MBOs)
- Hold regular breakfast or lunch meetings monthly or quarterly:
  - Discuss current items affecting the department.
  - Cover broader items that are happening in the organization.
  - Allow for and encourage questions.
- Display current “news” items. Put up a bulletin board or something similar for department and company news items to be placed. Keep it current.
- Hold impromptu meetings as needed. When new, urgent information comes to your attention, share this information with those on your team who are affected.
- Return phone and e-mail messages to your team members promptly.
- Develop your own way of sending handwritten notes to your team members.

How to communicate with your manager:

- Have regularly scheduled meetings with your manager. If he or she does not initiate them, arrange to get on his or her calendar.
- Know how your manager prefers to receive information.
- Make sure there are no surprises:
  - Keep your manager informed of any important issues that affect your team.
  - Invite your manager periodically to attend your staff meetings.
- Make use of informal opportunities, such as lunches, travel, and social events to communicate with your manager.

## STRATEGIES FOR COMMUNICATING WITH OTHER KEY GROUPS

In addition to effectively communicating inside the team, it is also critical that leaders develop strong communication across departments. Clear and open communication channels between departments have several advantages: surfaces issues, problem solving, minimizes rework, and increases productivity. Below is a list of strategies to first identify these key groups and then foster strong communication with them.

- Identify the key groups that your team needs to interact with.
- Develop relationships with your peers in those groups.
- Create opportunities to relay pertinent information on your team's activities and successes to these key groups. Opportunities might include:
  - Your manager's staff meetings
  - Newsletters
  - Lunches
  - Meetings that include members of these groups

The next step is to understand how to apply the strategies within your specific company culture.

*Company culture* is made up of the psychology, attitudes, experiences, beliefs, and values (personal and cultural) of an organization. It has been defined as “the specific collection of values and norms that are shared by people and groups in an organization and that control the way they interact with each other and with stakeholders outside the organization.”

## UNDERSTANDING A COMPANY’S CULTURE

Answers to the following questions can help uncover and articulate a company culture:

1. How would you describe this company? Answer as if you were describing a person (three words). When you talk about where you work, what do you tell people?
2. What does the company value? What is important here? How do you know it’s important?
3. What areas are dominant here? Does marketing lead, or finance, or production? Why?
4. What are the “unwritten rules” for getting along in this organization? What do we always do? Never do?
5. How does the organization handle conflict? Good news? Bad news? Deadlines? Decision making? (Provide examples of ways that the company has handled crises.)
6. Whom do you see as the primary customers of the company? What happens when a key customer complains? To what extent does the company hold true to its expressed standards for dealing with its customers? Shareholders? Stakeholders? Employees?

Having a clear understanding of the culture provides leaders with important context for managing performance situations. Without this context leaders are vulnerable to making mistakes and taking missteps that can lead to larger and potentially risky situations.

A leader’s HR partner is typically a good resource for explaining the company culture as well as how performance is managed within the culture. Successful leaders join with their HR partners to gain an understanding of the culture and how to navigate within it.

## ONBOARDING: A FRESH START

Starting a new role or hiring a new employee is one of the few opportunities that we have in our professional experiences to start with a clean state. It is critical to take advantage of this unique opportunity. This fresh start allows us either as the manager or as the new employee to set clear expectations or establish performance standards that in turn allow us to avoid many common performance problems. So how do we do this?

### STEP ONE: START WITH A PLAN

After orientation, a new employee usually reports to his work area and hopefully is allowed to get acquainted with his coworkers, the physical environment, and his manager. This is a pretty easy process, and most new hires and their teams are excited to get to know one another and are looking for ways to make the transition smooth. There are times, however, when this initial excitement wears off quickly, and new hires are left to “figure things out” by themselves with no structure or plan. Managers who don’t hire people often are usually the ones guilty of not putting enough thought and preparation into how their new hires will spend those first few days, weeks, and months on the job. The managers may start with great intentions and have a few early meetings, but then not give the new employee enough to do, or give him too much information to absorb at once. The manager and the rest of the team, will quickly revert back to their work habits and routine, without much consideration of the new hire. Sometimes a coworker or “buddy” will be assigned to train or get the new employee up to speed. This can work effectively if the coworker is engaged and clearly understands what is expected during this process. Unfortunately, what typically happens is that the new hire shadows this person without a clear picture of how what he’s seeing relates to his job. He feels like a burden because he cannot contribute much to the process. It is also common for the responsibility of new-hire training to fall on a select few individuals who can become quickly burned out because they are called upon too often to show the ropes to new people in their department.

## The Critical Importance of an Onboarding Plan

What is missing from the typical scenario is an onboarding plan. Some refer to it as a 90-day plan or a transition or integration plan. Whatever you call it, the important thing is to have one! As soon as the job offer has been accepted by the candidate, the hiring manager, with the help of her HR partner, should discuss the most important things that this new hire must do during his first few months on the job.

Equally important is identifying the people with whom he needs to build relationships in order for him to accomplish those things. Just the concept of having a 90-day plan gives both the manager and the new hire the opportunity to use the first weeks as a chance to both “learn and do.” It is important to have a healthy balance of getting and absorbing information and actually delivering work. Too often organizations are heavy on one or the other. Some expect new employees to sit in their offices or work spaces and read binders full of policies and procedures, or voluminous reports, or endless e-learning programs with no context. Others have demand for work and expect the new employee to hit the ground running and start to contribute immediately.

There are always various definitions of what exactly “immediately” means, and this creates unrealistic expectations both for the new hire and for the organization. The work delivered is often of low quality or just wrong, which results in rework and frustration from the new hire and the organization.

## Building In Quick Hits and Early Wins

The onboarding plan takes into account both the *type* of information that a new hire needs and *when* he needs it. It also identifies “quick hits” or “early wins,” which are those smaller objectives and tasks that new employees can accomplish and check off the list so that they feel like they are contributing to the business while gaining credibility and traction in their new role.

A good onboarding program lays out the specific roles and responsibilities of all the participants. We find that the best-practice onboarding programs use the “three-legged stool” model

of onboarding. The hiring manager, the HR partner, and the new employee are all key participants in the process and have specific roles that are played out. If any one of the participants fails to perform his or her part of the process, one of the legs is “broken,” and the onboarding experience is not as effective as it could be. We also find it extremely helpful to spell out the roles and responsibilities of each of these process participants as they are being introduced to the onboarding program. They can refer to it throughout the experience to keep each other on track. Build a document that spells out the roles and responsibilities of all the participants in the onboarding programs in your organization and then share it. In the sidebar below you’ll find an example of an *Onboarding Process Partner Roles and Responsibilities Summary*. Although it may seem overly formal to lay out this type of document, it will serve as a touchstone as you start to develop who will do what actions throughout the process.

**Human Resources Partner.** An HR process partner is a member of the HR team who works most closely with the new employee to facilitate his or her onboarding process.

*Role:*

- Serves as the onboarding process guide for the new employee and functions as a guide and confidante.
- Facilitates the establishment of onboarding objectives, early wins, and the stakeholder analysis.
- Shares key documents and related insights with the new employee.
- Focuses on creating role clarity throughout the new employee’s onboarding process.
- Facilitates the team alignment process (for new managers).
- Formally and informally gathers feedback regarding the new employee’s effectiveness and assists in identifying and implementing solutions and developmental actions.

**Hiring Manager.** The manager of the new employee plays a critical role in the onboarding process.

*Role:*

- Serves as the primary information source regarding role expectations and direction of the new employee.
- Acts as the sounding board for the new employee and provides feedback and direction as the new employee learns about his or her role and the organization.
- Shares insight and advice about the employee's team and key stakeholders.
- Collaborates with the HR partner to ensure alignment of their actions throughout the new employee's onboarding process.

**New Employee.** The new employee is responsible for managing his or her onboarding process. While the hiring manager and HR partner will provide support and guidance, the new employee drives the overall process.

*Role:*

- Takes the initiative to work with his or her hiring manager to set and understand onboarding objectives, identify targeted onboarding meetings, and facilitate other transitioning activities.
- Reaches out to process partners when assistance is needed and is receptive to feedback and direction from those partners.
- Maintains a willingness to develop and demonstrate a deep understanding of and respect for the organization, its people, and practices.

There is a commercial running on television that shows a customer talking with his financial advisor. They finish the conversation, and the customer starts to walk away when a big, bright green line

appears on the ground as he walks. Surprised, he turns around and asks his advisor about it, who tells him to “stay on the line” because that is his path to reaching the financial goals that the two of them just created. In one commercial, the customer walks out into the street, following his green line, but stops at a luxury car dealer to look in the window. The financial advisor looks out her door and down the street and motions the customer back to the green line. The customer looks a bit sheepish but happily returns to his path and walks on down the street. Think of the onboarding plan as the “green line” for new employees. It is the road map that keeps them and the organization focused on what’s important and when it’s important. There will be times when the employee or someone in the organization veers off the path and will need the help and feedback of someone to get him back on track, just like the financial advisor did for her customer.

### Sample Onboarding Plan

Time Period	Actions	Resources
<b>Prestart</b>	Review the <i>New Hire Briefing Packet</i>	Links to company Web site
<b>Week One</b>	Logistical setup Attend orientation	New hire checklist
	Meet with manager	Agenda
	Understand company organization structure	Organization charts and year-end reports
<b>Month One</b>	Understand company financials Understand company language and acronyms Understand function’s key processes	Monthly reports, project meetings
	Learn company strategy and key competitors	Sales and operations presentations

(continued on next page)

Time Period	Actions	Resources
<b>Month One</b>	Build relationships with key stakeholders	Personal network agenda
	Manage personal and family transition	Relocation specialist
<b>Month Two</b>	Assess the team	Performance reviews and interviews
	Participate in team alignment process	HR partner
	Learn how company measures performance	Balanced scorecard meeting
	Understand how each function operates within the company	Peer meetings
	Learn and embrace company's culture	Culture road map
<b>Month Three</b>	Participate in formal feedback process Continue to orient self and family to the area Develop/revise function's strategic plan	Survey
	Transition to performance management	Performance management on the intranet

### Onboarding Plans Are Not Just Task Lists or Checklists

Let's take a look at what a typical onboarding plan might look like. Best practices suggest that the objectives are somewhat high level, time based, and have resources associated with them so that they can be carried out. It is important to note that an onboarding plan is not a task list or checklist. It identifies those key areas that the new employee should focus on, and there are usually several steps or tasks associated with the larger objectives.

So let's take an example of an objective and break it down into tasks, or "early wins" that will help the employee accomplish that objective. In month one, the first objective is "understand company financials." Because this is a broad objective, the employee will probably get started on it in month one but may not have the objective completed until later. There are several steps the employee will need to take to achieve this objective. First the employee must understand the company's financials and, for example, how the supply chain function can affect them.

Following are tasks or early wins that will help the employee accomplish this objective:

1. Review annual reports and company Web site.
2. Find a contact person(s) in finance who can provide the best overview as it relates to the supply chain.
3. Talk with team members to get their perspectives and hear about their experiences.
4. Attend meetings where financial results are reviewed.
5. Work on project team to launch product 2.0.

The new employee will also find that many of the tasks or early wins to meet certain objectives will overlap, and she can usually complete more than one objective at the same time. So, as she learns about the financials and how the supply chain affects them from a colleague in finance, she is also beginning to build a key cross-functional relationship with that someone or more than one person in finance.

As the new employee works on the onboarding plan, she starts to accomplish three main objectives in the process: gaining *knowledge* about the organization, the function, and her role; building key *relationships* that will help her achieve her objectives; and getting *feedback* that will allow her to know how she is fitting into the culture. These are the three most important components of a successful onboarding experience, and they set the stage for performance success as well. Too often, when these are lacking, the performance will slip, and issues will surface early. The feedback on a new employee will start to be, "She is not getting it," or "He is a bad fit," or "She was not the right hire for the job." Then unfortunately, the team and the organization will have to manage the situation by either

working around that person or confronting the situation with a corrective plan, replacement, or both. This costs the organization both time and resources that could have been saved if the onboarding had been implemented successfully.

### **STEP TWO: MANAGE THE PLAN**

It's great to have a plan, but the key to any successful plan is to execute it and to make changes and adjustments as you go along. The manager should be meeting with the new employee regularly, at least every other week, and weekly, if possible. This allows for frequent check-ins and alignment of priorities, questions, and clarification so that there is little chance of misunderstanding at this critical time. One of the most important relationships to develop for the new employee during his first 90 days is with his manager. It is also important that he develop good rapport with his coworkers and his customers, but if he is not aligned with his manager, then those other relationships will not be as important. He will also be able to learn about the culture from his manager and stay on track in achieving those onboarding objectives that are outlined in the plan.

The onboarding plan should also be used as the agenda for these check-in meetings. This will give the meetings both structure and consistency. It will allow the manager to track progress and decide when and if objectives have been met and if additional resources are needed to get them accomplished. It also can be used when it is time to wrap up the onboarding period and transition to the performance management process, as objectives can be transferred from the onboarding plan to the annual performance review.

### **STEP THREE: GIVE FEEDBACK EARLY AND OFTEN**

As coaches and human resources consultants, we are often asked how particular situations could have been avoided or how good employees could have been “saved.” And the answer we usually give is *feedback*. But it is not just the feedback itself, it is feedback done right and given at the right time to make a difference. It really is shocking to see how many managers avoid giving their employees the feedback they need when positive or negative behaviors or

### **Onboarding versus Performance Feedback**

Onboarding feedback as part of a structured onboarding process is different from performance feedback. It allows the new employee to see specifically how he is or isn't integrating into the culture of the organization. Onboarding feedback is not only about the deliverables of the job and the metrics that are typically used in performance management, but it is also about how well the new employee is integrating into the new role, as well as how others are perceiving him. This doesn't mean, however, that the feedback is not data-oriented. Surveys that measure fit and gather data about perceptions and conversations with peers, team members, the new employee's manager, and any other key stakeholders can collect hard evidence of how a new employee is transitioning and integrating into the job.

performance issues occur. In the context of the onboarding experience, it is critical to set the stage for feedback early and often. It allows the new employee to get used to the idea that her new organization and culture do provide feedback, both in positive and constructive forms and is committed to doing so to make her more successful in her job. The old "no news is good news" just doesn't work anymore. This is especially true for the younger generations

### **Five Key Steps to Building Feedback into the Onboarding Experience**

1. Match metrics to objectives.
2. Collect quantitative and qualitative data.
3. Include all participants.
4. Collect data as early as 45 days and no later than 60 days from the new employee's start date.
5. Report results both for how well the individual is onboarding and how effectively the organization is supporting the new employee's onboarding.

such as Gen X and Gen Y. They were raised on feedback and lots of it (mostly positive, so that can be a bit of a challenge), but they demand it, so managers must be ready.

The new hire who is not aware of his mistakes will continue to make them if no one is pointing them out. The result can be lost time, bad decisions, damaged relationships, and even failure. “Drive-by” feedback is also pretty common and is found mostly in hallway conversations or other informal settings. This may be a brief comment by the new employee’s manager or peer without context or further explanation as to why a particular behavior or action didn’t fit. The new employee is left with more questions than he had before he received the feedback and may be unsure as to what to correct or how.

#### **Tips for Collecting and Giving Outstanding Feedback**

- Put feedback topics on meeting agendas.
- Set aside enough time to have a good conversation.
- Do not save a sensitive topic for the end of a meeting.
- Be honest and direct but kind.
- Assume innocence and listen to why the behavior occurred.
- Solicit specific feedback from peers, customers, and other stakeholders to deliver to new employees.
- Describe the behavior and its impact on the organization, the team, or an individual.
- Send out short confidential e-mail surveys to key stakeholders such as team members, peers, and the manager.
- Ask questions of key stakeholders in private and in public to solicit good data.
- Practice active listening.
- Ask open-ended questions.
- Offer resources to support development.

Secondhand and humorous feedback are just as ineffective as drive-by feedback because they also lack context or examples to help the new employee understand why something he did may have been out of line. One example might take the form of, “I heard you really let them have it in that budget meeting!” Is that a good thing or a bad thing? The employee is left to decide for himself and doesn’t always come to the right conclusion. The most common results of these typical kinds of feedback for new employees are confusion, frustration, disillusionment, misperceptions, and performance issues. All can contribute to an alarming failure rate of new employees.

## SUMMARY

Onboarding can be the first important (and rather easy) step in setting up employees for long-term success. Establishing a standard of meeting objectives, building strong relationships, delivering results, and acting on feedback will provide employees with a solid base on which to develop their careers. If this is done well and embraced by both the employees and the organization, then performance will probably not be an issue, and development and succession planning will be more of the conversation in employees’ annual reviews.