



# Keeping Employees Accountable for Results

## Quick Tips for Busy Managers

Brian Cole Miller  
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## Take-Aways

- Success as a manager depends on the ability to get results from employees.
- Hold your employees accountable for their actions.
- Use the "SIMPLE" system: "Set expectations," "Invite commitment," "Measure results," "Provide feedback," "Link to consequences" and "Evaluate effectiveness."
- Learn and practice the SIMPLE approach as part of your development as a manager.
- Make your goals "SMART:" "Specific," "Measurable," "Action-oriented," "Realistic" and "Time-bound."
- Help employees improve by using feedback and consequences.
- A consequence is not the same as a punishment.
- Never go into an employee evaluation meeting with your document already written. Stay open to what the employee has to say.
- Be firm in holding employees accountable, but be compassionate, too.
- Always keep written records of performance-management meetings.

# Relevance

## What You Will Learn

In this summary, you will learn: 1) What "SIMPLE" stands for; 2) How to use the SIMPLE approach to hold employees accountable; 3) How to set "SMART" goals; and 4) How to give employees useful feedback.

## Review

If you're about to become a manager for the first time and don't have a clue about how to get your direct reports to do what you want them to do, use this book as a step-by-step primer. It explains what to say, when to say it and how to follow up. It teaches you why meeting and connecting with employees individually is so important if you want to keep them accountable and get results. Author Brian Cole Miller's advice will help you develop your coaching skills. It will also save you a lot of headaches if you're struggling with problem employees. Miller shows you how to work with difficult employees in a way that is supportive, yet puts the ownership of results squarely on the employee's shoulders - where it belongs. If you've just promoted someone to manager, or if you are a new manager, *getAbstract* suggests that you make this book a part of your on-the-job training and development curriculum.

# Summary

*"The success of any organization comes down to one thing: how well it organizes its members to focus on and work toward the same purpose."*

*"Everything done anywhere in the organization should link back to what it has declared is its most important work."*

## Insuring Accountability

"SIMPLE" is an acronym for an easy, six-step process you can use to encourage your employees to achieve real, measurable results.

The SIMPLE steps are:

- "Set expectations."
- "Invite commitment."
- "Measure results."
- "Provide feedback."
- "Link to consequences."
- "Evaluate effectiveness."

## Step 1: "Set Expectations"

Before you can hold employees accountable, you must identify and articulate your expectations. First, look at the whole organization, and sketch the big picture. Read company documents that explain its history, structure, mission, vision and values - its reasons for existing. Once you understand your organization's purpose, determine how your department or team fits in the overall perspective. Then, break it down further. What must individual employees do to ensure that the department or team achieves all its objectives?

List the specific activities employees must perform or behaviors they must exhibit to do their part. How, when, where and why should they do them? As manager, your job is to explain this to your employees so they understand clearly how their work contributes to the organization's mission and purpose. Be sure that you use words and analogies to which employees can easily relate.

To make sure that you and your employees share the same expectations, write down your specific goals for each employee. If possible, you and the employee should create these

*"There should be no question in your mind about what you are expecting of your employees, how much or what quality, and when."*

*"Learn who on your team is motivated by what and steer each person toward the applicable incentive."*

*"Feedback is information about behavior and its resulting impact."*

*"Single-word feedback is not specific enough to really help your employee, even if it's positive."*

goals together. This will become part of each person's performance plan. When employees buy into your goals, they are more likely to work hard to accomplish them.

Set goals that are "SMART," that is:

- "Specific."
- "Measurable."
- "Action-oriented."
- "Realistic."
- "Time-bound."

For each goal, answer the following five questions:

1. What exactly should the employee do?
2. How will the company measure his or her progress?
3. Is the goal something within the employee's direct control?
4. Is the goal realistic? For example, if an employee makes five widgets per day, asking them to make seven per day may be realistic. But a target of 15 per day is probably not.
5. What is the deadline? In the end, you should be able to answer the question of whether or not the employee accomplished the goal with a simple yes or no. You won't be able to determine whether the employee achieved the goal if you don't have a timeline. An open-ended goal is not a goal; it is wishful thinking.

### **Step Two: "Invite Commitment"**

Prepare for goal-setting discussions with employees. Anticipate their questions and rehearse your answers. Schedule individual meetings at mutually convenient times in a private setting that is conducive to such conversations. Tell the employee the meeting is about goal setting so the employee can also prepare.

At the individual meeting, explain your goals in detail. Invite the employee to ask questions and articulate concerns. Pay attention to his or her reactions. Evaluate body language. Project confidence that you and the employee together will be able to achieve the goals, and ask the employee directly to commit to that accomplishment. Don't settle for a less-than-direct answer. Employees will only work to achieve their goals if they have articulated their commitment. As their manager, you must elicit that promise. Beware of responses such as, "I'll try," or "I'll give it my best shot." These kinds of statements give employees ready-made excuses; after all, you can't prove they didn't try. A commitment is a promise, a definitive answer: "Yes, I will do that."

### **Step Three: "Measure Results"**

To determine whether employees have met their goals, you must be able to measure the results accurately, impartially, promptly, efficiently, fairly effortlessly, unobtrusively and cost-effectively. Ideally, automate measurement. The parameters you measure should be relevant and meaningful. Give employees access to their personal information and results, so they can use their measurements to improve their performance. Explain to employees how their achievements affect the entire organization and why their goals are relevant. Finally, compare employees' measured results with their goals.

### **Step Four: "Provide Feedback"**

Discussions with employees about how their results compare to their goals are opportunities for brainstorming and setting new goals. The purpose of providing feedback is to

*"Be open to the idea that you may have been wrong about something, have inaccurate data, or may have jumped to a conclusion unfairly or prematurely."*

*"No process is complete without an evaluation."*

*"You are working with decent adults who deserve to be treated with dignity and respect."*

help employees progress - and they can't progress without information. You may feel uncomfortable providing negative feedback or pointing out that an employee has not met a goal, but this is an essential part of your job as manager. You'll strengthen your relationships with employees when you have serious discussions about performance.

When you provide honest feedback, you demonstrate that you care about your employees and that you want them and the organization to succeed. Providing feedback gives you a chance to clear up misunderstandings, alleviate hurt feelings, and help employees learn and grow. Of course, some ways of delivering feedback - whether it is positive or negative - are better than other ways.

Follow these guidelines:

- Speak with the employee sooner rather than later, unless the employee is already upset and therefore unreceptive.
- Deliver feedback in private.
- Explain that your purpose is not to criticize but to help them develop, improve and excel.
- Tailor your conversational style to each employee, based on your knowledge of that individual, and his or her personality and preferences.
- Be specific and get to the point. List facts, examples and figures. Avoid generalities such as "always" and "never."
- Eliminate the word "but" and replace it with "and." "But" and words, such as "however" and "yet," negate whatever preceded them, making the earlier feedback useless.
- Explain the impact of the employee's actions on the organization and its ability to meet its goals. Demonstrate that the employee's successes or failures matter.

A feedback conversation is not a monologue. Ask employees about their perspectives and concerns. Stay alert to verbal and nonverbal cues about their emotional state. Remain objective and open to discovery; try not to prejudge or anticipate what an employee will say.

To conclude the conversation, summarize what you heard in the discussion to make sure you've reached a mutual understanding. If necessary, provide specific suggestions for improvement - although most employees will offer their own.

### **Step Five: "Link to Consequences"**

Feedback is valuable only if it results in action. Many employees need only to hear your feedback to get on the right track. However, some need a reminder that their behavior has consequences before they manage to change or take action.

Do not confuse consequences with punishment. Punishment is negative, and it seldom works. In contrast, consequences emerge naturally from an action or behavior - you may not even need to do anything. For example, if an employee chooses to work outdoors during a thunderstorm, he or she will get wet. Most consequences, though, require more from you. If an employee chooses to stay on the job outside in a thunderstorm even after you explain that doing so is a safety violation, then you may need to put a note in the employee's file or require the employee to take a safety course.

Your goal in enforcing a consequence is not to avenge yourself; it is to help the employee take appropriate action in the future. Don't threaten employees with punishment unless you have no alternative - for example, if an employee faces disciplinary action for nonperformance. Even then, try to balance negative and positive consequences.

*"You can still be compassionate, caring and sensitive even when you are firm in administering disciplinary or other action."*

*"Coach your employee to develop an action plan rather than dictating one to him."*

*"You will have a tough time holding others accountable if you do not hold yourself accountable."*

Before you implement a consequence or take disciplinary action, check with the human resource department, the legal department or your manager to make sure your action conforms to the law, the organization's rules, and any relevant contracts or agreements.

When implementing a consequence with an employee, take the following steps:

- Provide detail.
- Explain your reasons for acting, how the incident will be documented and the next step.
- Invite questions and answer them.
- Plan the future and how they can improve. Give assistance, counsel and encouragement.
- Ask the employee to recommit to his or her goals.
- Set a date for a follow up meeting.
- Document your discussion.

### **Step Six: "Evaluate Effectiveness"**

The final step in the SIMPLE process is your self-evaluation. Examine what you've been doing, whether it's working, where you're following the process, where you need to be more diligent and what kinds of results your employees are getting. Use self-evaluation as part of your growth and development - you may even want to discuss it with your manager. Make progress in using the SIMPLE technique a goal in your personal performance plan.

### **The Performance Plan**

Use the SIMPLE technique as a guide in creating employee performance plans; that is one of its main purposes. To ensure that your performance plan for each employee is accurate and complete, put it in writing. Then, you and the employee are each accountable. This basic document need not be overly complex; it is a work in progress designed to keep you and the employee on track. Write the plan after your discussion so that both of you have input. Include the employee's thoughts, opinions and concerns as well as your own agenda.

A performance plan should include these elements:

- Information about the employee.
- When the discussion took place.
- What you discussed.
- The employee's areas of responsibility.
- The employee's SMART goals.
- The actions you will take to help the employee achieve the goals.
- Resources available to the employee.
- Dates for follow-up meetings.
- The employee's signature and yours.

A human resource manager or your superior should review the document to ensure it fulfils the company policies. Then, you and the employee should review and update it regularly.

## About the Author

**Brian Cole Miller** owns a management training company and is the author of *Quick Team-Building Activities for Busy Managers*.