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## Positive Coaching

Most coaching is critique, whether it is formal or informal coaching, within or outside of the corporate setting. If you think of it, even the language people commonly use when they talk about improving performance frequently implies a deficit – “gap analysis” is one such example. And then there is the dreaded performance review with its traditional structure of – “You’re good at this, but you have to improve at that.”

The critique way of thinking assumes that there is a common ideal for everyone in a particular position. But each person – and especially a talented person – comes with a unique set of strengths. And in some contexts, the same strength can be a weakness. See Lindsay’s story (at right). It’s an industrial way of thinking to bring everyone to the same standard. By contrast, it’s a talent way of thinking to focus on strengths and figure out how to use them, or to free a person to look for a fit somewhere else.

Organizations tend to place the coaching burden on managers but without giving them the tools to do the job comfortably. Many of us who work as coaches either inside or outside of Human Resources have taken an approach not too different from the Positive Psychology one in our work, but don’t give managers either the knowledge or the tools to be successful. Instead, managers feel responsible for “changing” or “developing” someone without knowing if it is possible or even what the person wants.

Particularly if you are a partner, the lead salesperson, the primary developer of new prod-

ucts, or someone else critical to the success of your organization, you can’t afford to spend hours of your time on your worst performers. You must spend your own time on what makes your organization successful, not on elaborate processes for micro-monitoring and managing the pay and performance of people working for you.

In addition, circumstances change in businesses, and those changes may require new or different kinds of performance from current employees. You need easy ways of changing your expectations as circumstances change. Employees also change, and you will need to adjust how you manage their performance as they change.

If you are in a dynamic business or a small business, you haven’t got the time to manage people by annual goals and results. You have to know that the results are going to be there. Annual or even quarterly performance reviews aren’t enough.

Thanks to the prodding of an especially creative client, Career Strategies is in the process of developing some new positive coaching tools for managers to use. They are based upon competencies easily monitored by managers. They help managers craft the competencies they do want to see on the job, or “positive coaching.” They should give managers the time to manage performance AND give them back the time to achieve their own goals.

If you would like to Beta test these tools, please let us know. ■

### Do you use critique or Positive Psychology in your organization?

## We Recommend...

*...for more on Positive Psychology:*

Positive psychology is a movement and a discipline we in the corporate world can learn a lot from. For a quick introduction, read the “**Introduction to Positive Psychology**” by Martin E.P. Seligman and Mihaly Csikszentmihalyi at:

<http://www.msu.edu/~dwong/CEP991/CEP991Resources/Seligman-PositivePsych.doc>

*Turn over for “Success Stories”*

## Lindsay Stops Failing

Everybody knew Lindsay was bright, so what was wrong? Why was this job so hard for her? She trained as a statistician, even thought seriously about being an academic. She had particularly loved the group projects and the rigorous feedback she had been given as an academic. There was real pressure to be completely accurate.

Now, working in her cubicle in a market research firm, Lindsay was completely de-motivated, lonely and upset. She was accused of never finishing anything. She was told she just didn’t have what it takes to work in a business environment. She was told she wasted people’s time by asking for feedback on her work. “Just get it done, Lindsay.”

The first thing Lindsay thought of was going back to academia. She had clearly been a failure in business. But she knew she enjoyed the teamwork and excitement of the business setting. Was there anything she could do well? Positive coaching, some exercises that uncovered Lindsay’s strengths, some practice talking about her strengths with pride, and a little help from her friends got Lindsay in the right position – as the statistician on a clinical trials team. They appreciate her drive for accuracy. ■

## We Recommend...

*...for help calculating talent value:*

For an interesting and helpful approach to calculating the value of talent to an organization, read “**The New Metrics of Corporate Performance: Profit per Employee**”, an article by Lowell L. Bryan in The McKinsey Quarterly 2007 #1.

# Success Stories

*Names of clients and some facts about them have been changed to maintain confidentiality.*

## Gary's Management Challenge

Gary was new to the job of Director of Human Resources. His second in command, Noreen, had been there for ages. "She really knows her stuff," Warren the COO had told Gary when he was interviewing. "We don't want her to leave, but we've hired you because you are customer-service oriented. Her version of Human Resources is more like an auditor. It drives all of us crazy. See if you can't get her to be more like you."

Now, six months later, Gary had gotten nowhere with Noreen. She was even rude to Gary when he asked for something. He felt as if he was spending too much of his time trying to teach Noreen something she was unwilling to learn and the rest of the time trying to catch Noreen doing something to criticize her for.

So, he tried a positive coaching approach. First, he had to accept the fact that he might never be able to convert Noreen into a customer-focused HR person. He set aside some money for severance for her, just in case, and got Warren on board for the next step.

First, Gary held a meeting with all his staff on his customer service expectations. He instituted a simple service feedback process that went out to all managers every other week. He asked to receive all positive comments and put together some simple rewards. Soon, other members of the staff were getting positive customer comments – all but Noreen, that is. Every staff meeting, Gary reiterated his expectations and recognized those who had gotten compliments.

After about a month, Noreen asked to see him. "I'm resigning," she said. "I just can't believe how you have been asking us to baby sit our managers. They don't know anything about HR, but you expect us to help them anyway. I've got a new job now where I can treat incompetent managers the way they should be treated."

Gary's management challenge was resolved. ■

## Good Luck, Karen!

Karen Holmes was a talented product development manager and systems development manager. After a successful career in insurance and high tech, she is starting her own business.

In Karen's words, "I've been a client of Priscilla's for several years and with her support I am making a career change – giving up the corporate rat race for owning my own business, a knitting shop, which has been a dream for many years. The store is called Fresh Purls, Ltd. and is located in Providence, RI. Our goal is to offer knitters of all types an affordable, yet unique knitting experience by providing an array of yarns and knitting supplies along with "Knit Therapy Night" and classes in a relaxed and comfortable atmosphere at the retail shop or an easy and attractive shopping experience on the web."

**If you are in the area, please stop by:**

**Fresh Purls**

769A Hope Street, Providence, RI 02906

Ph: **401-270-8220** | Fax: 401-270-8222

**karen@freshpurls.com** | **www.freshpurls.com** (coming soon)

Are you a Career Strategies client who has started a new business? We would be happy to give your business a plug in our newsletters!

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Check out our newly updated website!

[www.career-strategies.com](http://www.career-strategies.com)

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