
Best Practices for Results-Based Management

“Set your expectations high; find men and women whose integrity and values you respect; get their agreement on a course of action; and give them your ultimate trust.”

- John Akers (1934–) IBM president 1983-1989, CEO 1985-1993, Chair 1986-1993

You want results from your efforts. You should expect results from your instructors. As a business owner, you need to enlighten, motivate, and ultimately inspire your employees. There are many models and systems available to help you accomplish that goal. Inspired leadership focuses on results; establishing clear goals and expectations for what you are trying to accomplish and requires involving your employees at all levels. It all begins with a few best practices for results-based (also known as performance-based) management:

- **Share your vision with your employees.** You must run a completely transparent operation. With results-based management, employees need to have a sense of ownership. They know beyond the shadow of a doubt what your company stands for and where it's going. If they don't know the big picture, how can they make it their own? Besides, when employees have a clear picture of your mission and vision, the expectations you help them set will make sense to them. They'll be more likely to buy into and achieve the intended outcomes.
- **Work with your staff to set challenging, yet attainable goals.** Just like you work with your gymnasts to help them develop their goals so you can create a plan to help them achieve those goals, work with your staff on their performance goals. That's right, work *with* them. Don't impose expectations on your employees. In order to get buy-in, you need to make certain that the workers have helped create their objectives. Sit down with employees and hammer out goals together. Make it a priority. Never assume that your staff automatically knows what they're supposed to be doing. Clear and concise objectives are as vital to your employees' performance as equipment is to your gymnasts.
- **Give them a real voice in the company's future.** Don't just let employees set their own expectations. Let them have real input into the gym's future. No matter how often you tell your employees "this is your company, too," if they have no real say-so, it's just lip service. Collaborate with them. Solicit their ideas and contributions. More precisely, actually *take* their advice and run with it. If you don't trust your employees enough to help shape your company's future, why did you hire them in the first place?
- **Make sure their work is meaningful.** Take advantage of the talent in your organization. No one likes busywork or routine, mind-numbing tasks. Give your employees challenging assignments and expectations that stimulate their minds and that have a real impact on your organization. If you sense that an employee is just going through the motions, take him to lunch and ask, "What would challenge you?" Ask him to come up with a new product or service or process for your company and then let him be in charge of the project. It's amazing how few leaders really do this—but it's a tremendously empowering and inspiring gesture.
- **Tell your employees it's okay to take risks—in fact, it's expected.** A big part of being successful involves *Risk*; without it there can be no significant gain. Just

like innovation in gymnastics takes place by those athletes willing to take the risk to try new skills, you need to make the possibility of failure OK. This is the real reason you need to keep the “big picture” in front of employees at all times—it helps them take calculated risks aimed at advancing not only their own expectations but also your corporate vision. When people are free to take risks, they are likely to explore multiple possibilities and find unexpected solutions. They will own these solutions and hold themselves accountable. To inspire risk-taking in your employees, take risks yourself. In this way you model the creative spirit you want them to embrace.

- **Put systems in place for measuring productivity.** The whole point of a results-oriented culture is to help employees become more productive. That’s why you must be sure not to confuse activity with progress. There is a big difference between being busy and being productive. Put systems in place for measuring productivity and live by them. What gets measured gets done. Do everything you can to eliminate redundancies and make sure your people understand that being busy is not the same as being productive. Your gymnasts can spend a lot of time in the gym; their success depends on how productive that time is. The same rule applies for your staff.
- **Give both formal and “real time” feedback often.** Establish ongoing (recommended quarterly) evaluation processes so people can get feedback on how well they’re meeting their expectations. But don’t limit feedback to formal assessments. You should tell people in “real time” what they’re doing wrong so they can correct it, but it’s even more important to tell them what they’re doing *right*. Spontaneous coaching is one of the most critical elements of a positive-value culture. It is the pathway to productivity. This kind of feedback refines the processes by which employees meet their expectations today, and paves the way for them to meet ever-more-ambitious expectations in the future.