6 Ways to Encourage a Performance-Oriented Culture

Issue: Nearly half of U.S. employees say their employers have not set clear performance goals for them.

Risk: If employees aren't given goals, they become inefficient, unproductive and bored.

Action: Encourage supervisors to use these six steps to create a goal-oriented culture in your workplace.

When you walk around your workplace, it may look like everyone knows what they're doing. But do they? HR and department supervisors shouldn't blindly assume so.

In fact, a recent KeyGroup survey of 1,700 people found that 47 percent said they aren't working toward clear-cut goals in their jobs. And it's typically not because they don't want to; it's because their leaders aren't asking them to.

"When employees don't have crystal-clear goals to work toward, they're going to waste time and resources," says KeyGroup CEO Joanne Sujansky. If goal-setting isn't a priority, she says, employees are likely to view your organization as a "wonderland," as in "Wonder what we should be doing next?"

Advice: If your organization is goal-challenged, talk with the top brass about ways to inject more goal setting into the culture. You'll be able to pitch this as an HR and a bottom-line idea, which will earn you points for your strategic thinking.

Here are six tips for setting up goal posts in your organization:

1. Share the "big picture" with employees. Run a completely transparent operation. "When employees have a clear picture of your mission and vision," Sujansky says, "the goals you help them set will make sense to them. They'll be more likely to buy into and achieve those goals."

2. Work with employees to set challenging, yet attainable goals. Work *with* them; don't impose goals on employees. Remember, you're looking for buy-in. Never assume employees know what they're supposed to be doing. Use job descriptions to move the conversation along.

3. Give employees a real voice in the organization's future. Solicit their ideas and contributions. More importantly, actually *take* their good advice and run with it.

4. Make sure their work is meaningful. If a supervisor senses an employee is just going through the motions, he should take the worker to lunch and ask, "What would challenge you?"

"It's amazing how few leaders really do this," says Sujansky. "But it's a tremendously empowering and inspiring gesture."

5. Tell your employees it's OK to take risks—in fact, it's expected. This is the main 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 goals but also your corporate vision.

6. Measure productivity, and give feedback. Don't confuse activity with progress. The point of goal setting is to help employees become more productive. Put systems in place to measure productivity and live by them. Remember the mantra: What gets measured gets done.

Remind supervisors not to limit feedback to formal evaluations. Give it on the spot. And give positive, as well as negative, critiques.