

A Manager's Role in Obtaining a Fair Day's Work for a Fair Day's Pay—Part II¹

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In an earlier article titled "A Manager's Role in Obtaining a Fair Day's Work for a Fair Day's Pay—Part 1" (HR009), we discussed the role managers play in achieving a fair day's work for a fair day's pay based on readers' responses to eight agree/disagree statements. In this article, we will revisit the challenge of getting a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

Do you agree or disagree with the statement that "nearly all associates will do a fair day's work for a fair day's pay when their leader develops and maintains an appropriate work atmosphere"?

How did you answer this question? The statement "a fair day's work for a fair day's pay" suggests that both the associate and manager have a role to play. What does it mean to provide a fair day's work for a fair day's pay anyway? Before we share our thoughts, take a moment to consider the role managers play in helping associates putting forth a "fair day's work."

Managers and supervisors often have more influence over the productivity of their associates than they realize. Inappropriate management beliefs and practices can cause associates to put forth a productivity level that can best be described as "I will do just enough to get by" (or potentially even less). In today's exceedingly competitive marketplace, an associate who attempts to "just get by" will not result in management receiving a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.

Eight Agree/Disagree Statements

The extent to which the managers in your organization hold on to beliefs that tend to retard employee productivity and organizational profitability can be determined by the answers to the following eight agree/disagree statements.

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For maximum effectiveness, please answer these statements before reading the authors' comments.

1. It is natural for managers to provide more negative than positive feedback in the workplace. Agree _____
Disagree _____
2. When working with associates to improve performance, it is of critical importance to determine the specific reason(s) for the inappropriate behavior. Agree _____ Disagree _____
3. Negative feedback will not usually result in an improvement in associate performance. Agree _____
Disagree _____
4. Most positive feedback that managers give to associates for good performance is not heard by the associates. Agree _____ Disagree _____
5. Effective supervisors manage associates by exception. Agree _____ Disagree _____
6. Investing in new technology is more important to organizational success than investing in associate development. Agree _____ Disagree _____
7. In creating a positive motivational climate, it is important to treat associates equally. Agree _____
Disagree _____
8. Good people managers utilize the Golden Rule: "Treat others the way that you want to be treated." Agree _____ Disagree _____

Number of your agree statements? _____

Number of your disagree statements? _____

Authors' Comments

Your authors believe there is only one "agree" statement and seven "disagree" statements. The following is a discussion of the agree/disagree statements from your authors' perspective (based on current behavioral research).

It is natural for managers to provide more negative than positive feedback in the workplace. Disagree. While it may be true that many managers provide more negative than positive feedback, the key word here is "natural." In spite of managers being conditioned to provide more negative than positive feedback in the workplace, providing negative feedback is not a natural behavior. It is a learned behavior,

often first learned from our parents. Given that it is a learned behavior then it is also possible to unlearn it.

When working with associates to improve performance, it is of critical importance to determine the specific reason(s) for the inappropriate behavior. Disagree. Managers often like to know what the specific reasons are for poor performance, but the critical issue is how the associate will improve his performance in the future. The specific reasons for poor performance can be used to help the manager and the associate improve future performance, but the primary focus should be on improving future performance. Because specific reasons for poor performance may be of a very personal nature, the manager should act in a gentle and kind manner, with an eye toward using the associate's ideas on what he is going to do to improve future performance.

Negative feedback will not usually result in an improvement in associate performance. Disagree. It is possible for negative feedback to result in minimal, short-term improvement in associate performance. Improvement of this kind is associated with compliance motivation (doing just enough to get by). Furthermore, after a short period, the associate is likely to revert to unacceptable performance levels, making additional feedback necessary. You can bet the associate is a very unwilling participant in this type of management and will only do what is absolutely required. Associates operating under compliance motivation can be easily recognized as those associates who usually leave work exactly on time, do only assigned tasks (those included in their job description), and are always just meeting and/or pushing deadlines. Another problem with negative feedback is that it creates a situation where the associate is unwilling to go the extra mile, which can be devastating in today's highly competitive business environment.

Most positive feedback that managers give to associates for good performance is not heard by them. Agree. This is because of the overwhelming use of negative feedback and the inappropriate way most positive feedback is presented. How many times have you heard a manager give positive feedback only to destroy it by following the praise with one simple word: "BUT." Just as we recommend that you do not sugarcoat criticism, we also recommend that you do not mix "But" statements with praise. This results in the associate focusing on the criticism to the exclusion of the praise.

Effective supervisors manage associates by exception. Disagree. Management by exception means that the only time a manager "manages" is when there is a problem or an exception to acceptable performance. Most of us know

when we have done a good job, and we desired praise and recognition. An important component of getting a fair day's work for a fair day's pay is to recognize good performance. Managers who manage by exception become negative managers, and associates do not look forward to interacting with them. This technique destroys manager/associate communication and is not conducive to creating a positive motivational climate.

Investing in new technology is more important to organizational success than investing in associate development. Disagree. Some readers may have agreed with this statement given the increasing role of technology in business and our society. However, most managers indicate that their organization's most important resource is their human capital. These same managers think nothing of spending \$10,000 on technology, but balk at spending even \$1,000 to provide human resource management training for their associates.

In creating a positive motivational climate, it is important to treat associates equally. Disagree. This practice is counterintuitive to building an effective motivational climate and increasing the productivity of your associates. Associates are different—they put forth different levels of effort and have different abilities—so it is important for the manager to be fair in managing associates. For maximum productivity, this requires managers to treat their associates equitably, not equally.

Good people managers utilize the Golden Rule: "Treat others the way that you want to be treated." Disagree. What? How can your authors disagree with this statement? The problem with the Golden Rule is that it assumes everyone has identical personality types and values, which is untrue. Instead, we suggest managers use the Platinum Rule: "Treat others the way that *they* would like to be treated." Managers who implement the Platinum Rule are in a much better position to get a fair day's work for a fair day's pay.