

Punishing Good Performance

Whether you are a manager a leader or a parent, punishing good performance is one of the easiest, most common and potentially most damaging errors we can make with our people.

So what is it? Punishing good performance occurs when a person perceives that the more they do for you the more they are given to do, or if they feel they have done a good job and do not get any feedback for that job done well. We tend to delegate more to these people because we know that they will complete the task well and meet our expectations therefore causing fewer problems for us. The trouble is that all too often the recipient comes to feel as if they are being punished for a job well done and they start to get frustrated or angry. We then see that previously good workers performance drop.

Now you are possibly thinking to yourself, this is common sense, I would never do that. The trouble is that when we are busy and possibly under a bit of pressure our mind is more focussed on getting the tasks completed and the job done from our point of view, rather than considering how our people may feel about what is happening. The key is to think from the other person's perspective, key questions we could ask ourselves may be

1. What is the consequence to the individual of performing as desired?
2. Does the person perceive desired performance as being geared toward penalties?
3. Is it punishing to perform as expected?

When discussing this topic during training courses the examples I have been given are numerous. The main comment I get is that this is all very well but the job still has to be done. More often than not done quickly and perfectly, ie they way your best performer would do it.

So how do we not punish good performance? Based on my experience I think the best solution is simply to communicate. Talk with the person concerned about what you are asking them to do and explain why you want them to do it. Explain why they are the best person for the job and see if you can find out what tasks they particularly enjoy doing and try to find a way where they can spend some more time on that. At the same time of course you are looking for any and every opportunity you can to give your people good feedback about and reward what they do well. My belief is that if you think you are giving enough positive feedback to your people, you need to double it, and then you may be a bit closer.

Ultimately we as leaders of people need to be constantly thinking about how our colleagues perceive our leadership.

The other key thing you must be aware of is that you are not rewarding poor performance at the same time... But we'll save that for another time!