

“Building Tomorrow’s Organization Today”

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SUCCESS DIALOGUE

*Recreating “Performance Management”
within a framework of Personal Commitment,
Accountability and Stewardship*



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Ordeals of a Company Man

by Jack Englehard

Philadelphia – I work for a big company. I am small. I'm much smaller than the company. My boss told me so himself. He said, "The company is much bigger than you."

I work out of a cell. The company calls it an office but to me it's a cell. There are no padlocks on the door, except those I see in my mind. I could escape, but to where? Another corporation? That's all there is. I'm a company man.

I do everything I'm supposed to do, eight hours a day, 12 months a year. I get weekends off for good behavior. I get paid once every week whether I need the money or not.

I DON'T MAKE trouble. I play second base on the company softball team. I attend company picnics and parties and laugh when I'm supposed to. I don't sexually harass female colleagues – it's against company policy.

But this is a bad time of year. It's review time. That means I have to go before my boss and have him evaluate me. This goes on, I'm told, all over the country. People like me get reviewed. That's part of being a company man.

I'm tired of getting reviewed. All through school I got reviewed. Before I got married my wife reviewed me. She still reviews me. Everybody – even the bus driver – reviews me. I thought when I grew up I could relax, be myself. No such luck.

America was once the land of the rugged individualist. Now it's the land of the small corporate man. Would Daniel Boone have stood still for having his boss question his appearance, his cooperativeness, his initiative, his creativity, his productivity, his punctuality? Never.

But that was long ago, when Boone was big. People were big. Now people are small. The corporation is big.

The man who occupies the cell next to mine is small. The other day, he was smaller. He's a good company man. He uses words like "interface" and "input". But the other day he passed by my office in a daze, as if he had just been smashed by a demolition ball.

"THAT MAN," I said to myself, "just got reviewed."

Sure enough, he had.

He got a "fair" on appearance and cooperativeness, and "average" on initiative and productivity.

"I didn't get one 'outstanding'," he said.

He didn't show up today. I think he's home crying. I think he's destroyed.

Two days ago, I got reviewed.

"Let's interface," said my boss.

My boss is small, but I'm smaller. He's a good man. I'm also a good man.

"You're a good man," he said, and he put a check mark next to "good". Not "outstanding".

Well, I said to myself, so I'm not an "outstanding" man. Who is? But I'm punctual.

"Yes, you are," my boss said, and he checked off "above average" for "punctuality".

But do I comb my hair nicely, wear trim, dark suits, my tie in a corporate knot?

"I don't know," my boss said, mulling me over. "Your hair is kind of long. Your shoes could use a shine."

I got an "average" for "appearance". That didn't hurt because back in the days when I was a rugged individualist I used to be downright "slovenly". I prided myself in being a "slob" and in slurring my words like Marlon Brando.

"You know." my boss said, "you slur your words like Marlon Brando."

So I got a "poor" for speech.

All right, but despite these drawbacks, these flaws of character, I do "get along with people."

"You don't get along with people, do you?" my boss said.

That was a slap in the face.

"Who don't I get along with?" I asked.

"You're a loner."

I am?

Yes, I am. I got a "poor" in "cooperativeness".

IT WAS DOWNHILL from there. I didn't get one "outstanding". Not for "initiative". Not for "creativity". Not for "productivity". Funny, I used to think I was creative and productive. I even used to think of myself as cooperative and attractive. All I am, it turns out, is "punctual".

I didn't show up for work yesterday. I was at home. Should I go on living? My wife says yes. She thinks I'm at least average. She thinks I ought to go back to work and tell him off, my boss. I can't do that, of course – and that's no way to get even. What I can do tomorrow is review my secretary. I'm small, but I'm bigger than she is.



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Been Reviewed???

Most of us have been through our own “ordeal of a company man” (even on multiple occasions) and survived it. Over the past 15-20 years, U.S. corporations have been trying to improve on the traditional “performance appraisal.” We have begun to realize that the old “personnel” responsibility of ensuring that people have a rating or score attached to their file every year has been ineffective at best and more often a total waste of time. Rather than producing any positive performance changes, this “ritual” was simply a bureaucratic nightmare for managers and human resources professionals. Even worse, most employees found it to be an organizationally condoned opportunity for the “boss” to “get” the employee.

Rooted in this practice of performance appraisals was the fundamental and unquestioned belief and practice that the “boss” was the sole evaluator or assessor. He was assumed to know a given employee’s job expectations and performance the best. Of course, the evils inherent in that fallacy are countless:

| | |
|---|------------------------------|
| Top down secretiveness | Politically focused |
| Time-frame driven | No agreement on expectations |
| Isolated events drive “ratings” | Popularity contest |
| Punitive and non-developmental | Justify merit increase |
| No commitments gained | No accountability shared |
| Not tied to consequences | Written to satisfy HR |
| Often NO appraisals or feedback at all! | Always superior performance |

“That Ordeal was Bad – so here is the ‘Right’ Review Processes”

Tons of “performance appraisal” studies were conducted throughout the 1980’s focusing on these dilemmas and how to “train” managers to do better appraisals. All these impressive, internally focused efforts were met with external pressures for organizations to flatten, or increase spans of control, go global, restructure, etc. How could a manager be trained to better evaluate an employee that he or she saw maybe once a year, if ever? New issues arose from organizational restructuring and upheaval such as:

- Multiple bosses and work groups
- Remote work forces
- Multi-location teams
- More highly interdependent work groups
- More customer interaction

Suddenly the “reality” became the obvious – the boss simply does not have a singularly clear vantage-point of any employee’s day-to-day work. Multi-source appraisals, 360° and team evaluations emerged as a radical new idea to help address these issues. Theoretically, if an employee could receive performance input or assessments from those people with whom he or she worked most directly or intimately, the performance appraisal would have a greater chance



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of being more realistic, fair, balanced, performance-related, and reflective of ongoing work behaviors. All of these are ideal qualities of good feedback. New processes, forms, training programs, process facilitators and coaches became all the rage in top organizations across the U.S. and the world. We have been on a 360°/multi-source feedback whirlwind for nearly 15 years now. And, we have learned a great deal about how to do it well.

Of course, new dilemmas and obstacles arose to block, stifle or intimidate people using this seemingly exciting type of appraisal process:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|--------------------------------|
| “Boss’s” new role | Who controls the feedback? |
| Assessor selection | Is this “fishbowl” helpful? |
| Confidentiality & fear of retribution | Dumping sessions |
| Time requirements | Scheduling multiple parties |
| Consequences | Follow-up and follow-through |
| Development planning and action | Connections to Merit increases |

Some age-old issues continue to resurface. “Can I give you some feedback?” has become a politically correct entree for “Let me tell you what’s wrong with you.” Feedback, with all of its virtues, benefits and good intentions has become a loaded word – one that instills in many feelings of defensiveness, resentment and, ironically, a license to attack! Despite our efforts to, once again, “train” people to give specific, measurable, actionable and timely feedback – all in a positive and developmental way – we still have come to an overused or misused tool. We are still not getting at core performance issues!

FEEDBACK – What is it good for???

There is still and always will be a need for both people and organizations to acknowledge, receive and deliver some form of “feedback” to each other in order to become or maintain a high-performing work system. However, both the method and the focus of this exchange must shift dramatically.

Our methods must become highly interactive, an ongoing dialogue, and an integral “part” of the “way we work.” The content of the exchange will include both “What we do” and “How we do it.” It is no longer sufficient or acceptable to produce only results without insuring that the values and ethics of the organization are honored. With our economy so driven by service delivery and customer orientation, the “how” often becomes the “what” of our work! And, we need to be successful in both the “how” AND the “what” in order to fully succeed in business.

Success Dialogue®

Success Dialogue® evolved from our work with human systems over the past 30 years. While the principles are simple and basic, execution is the key. First, it is essential to eliminate performance reviews, appraisals and feedback as formal mechanisms. They haven’t worked anyway! Instead, envision a process that is an ongoing, integral part of our daily work interactions. A process which requires the people who “inter-depend” with each other to openly review the key aspects of the “what and how” of their work. A method that puts a finger



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constantly on the pulse of their system through simply talking to each other in direct, focused, clear, specific and growth oriented terms. A Dialogue between people focused on Success – We call this a Success Dialogue[®].

Peter Senge, in the book The Fifth Discipline, gives us the following insight into the practice of “dialogue.”

“...dialogue comes from the Greek dialogos. Dia means through. Logos means the word, or more broadly, the meaning. ...a free flow of meaning between people, in the sense of a stream that flows between two banks.”

“In dialogue, ...a group accesses a larger ‘pool of common meaning,’ which cannot be accessed individually. The whole organizes the parts, rather than trying to pull the parts into a whole.”

In a Success Dialogue we are willing to share the information, biases, thoughts, presumptions, history, vision, and point of view “openly” and listen just as openly to the same information, biases, etc., from others in the group. We can then apply this new awareness to build toward greater success for each person and for the group.

Do not mistake this as a method of ignoring and glossing over negative behaviors, poor performance or lack of results. Success Dialogue[®] relies on “real” feedback and the fact is that some feedback is offensive, threatening, negative, mean spirited, has probably already been shared with everyone except the person who desperately needs it. Keeping harsh, non-PC (politically correct) feedback from people prevents them from facing the consequences of their performance and behaviors. They cannot be accountable for their results simply because the harsh results are hidden from them. Success Dialogue[®] helps openly explore behaviors and results in ways that bring balance and action.

Success Dialogue[®] encourages seeking out and clarifying all behaviors that have both negative and positive impacts on the work system. It is accomplished with the expectation that individuals will grow to face the insight, pain and joy of true personal accountability. In addition, individuals explore and jointly define plans for improving the behaviors, patterns or dynamics that are hindering success.



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Elements of an Effective Success Dialogue®

Success Dialogue® depends on several key process elements:

- *Interdependent Grouping:*
The Success Dialogue® should involve individuals who are interdependent and share a stake in each other's success, regardless of level, position or department.
- *Agreed Criteria:*
There should be an accepted or agreed upon format for the Success Dialogue®, and criteria against which performance is compared. The format and criteria must be expected to change and grow as the individuals better understand their overall performance requirements in terms of their stakeholder needs, and as their roles grow.
- *Public:*
The Success Dialogue® must be open and public within the interdependent group, rather than secret or confidential.
- *Balanced:*
The Success Dialogue® must be balanced with multiple points of observation. No longer can one case or instance color an individual – either positively or negatively.
- *Connected to Consequences:*
The Success Dialogue® must connect individuals' performance and behaviors to both positive and negative consequences.
- *Process:*
The Success Dialogue® must connect people over time in a continuing process rather than activity or event based. Giving "Success Dialogue® Training" and doing an initial feedback session will not create long-term change. Only regular, continuous, iterative opportunities to account for personal behavior changes will have lasting impact. Over time you will hear:
 - We have to stop because everyone is frustrated with the process,
 - It is too time consuming,
 - It is not "useful, a waste of effort.Usually this is a sign that the feedback is about to get "real" and "effective," and if we keep pressing forward we can begin to see significant results from the dialogue.



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Leading a Success Dialogue – New Skills Are Required

The individuals who participate in a Success Dialogue will need to understand and develop several new skills or “Abilities” order to be effective. Individuals must develop the abilities to:

- *Commit* – purposefully and personally to the success of the larger group and organization
- *Define* – precisely what we are responsible for and to whom
- *Describe* – observations rather than judge motives and accuse
- *Declare* -- information openly and straightforwardly
- *Confront* – people and situations meaningfully and respectfully
- *Connect* – actions and choices to natural consequences
- *Listen* – for understanding without preparing a defense
- *Question* – in order to gain the whole picture, rather than to entrap

As with any new process or behavior, there may be a number of hurdles to cross – some common to traditional performance appraisals and 360° assessments:

Fear or discomfort confronting issues
Fear of retribution
What about confidentiality

Unwilling to Risk being Frank
Fear of What I’ll hear about myself
Not really wanting to help others

Are we ready for Success Dialogue

This method of managing and improving performance is a significant departure from performance reviews in the past. Not only is it important to assess and understand your organization’s readiness and capability to use Success Dialogue, it is critical for leaders to be personally ready to expose themselves to the Success Dialogue processes, initiating and driving the paradigm shift to effective performance management..

A Chinese proverb states:

“If you tell me, I will forget. If you show me, I will remember. If you involve me, I will understand.”

Success Dialogue truly “involves” people in the feedback process. No two Success Dialogue processes look exactly the same, we have several effective frameworks and prototypes which we have successfully used. Still, our approach is to work directly with an interdependent group to build a specific, continuing, forward focused process which expects openness, engenders mutual commitment, and sets the stage for real, tangible and personal improvement.



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BUILDING A PROCESS FOR SUCCESS DIALOGUE[©]

This is where the theory meets the road, and we decide to quit talking about how poor our performance management system – and we build a new one. The following elements apply:

Look at the Structure – Identify groups of people who interdepend with each other in getting real results for the organization.

- Clarify expectations and results indicators. This includes:
 - Group Results expected
 - Personal Role definitions and responsibilities of each member
 - Core Values for the group – how will we accomplish our results.
- Define the structure and format for the feedback:
 - Set a schedule for the group to meet together – with everyone to review progress against results and methodologies. (*Public*)
 - Identify the way feedback will be given (written, verbal, who will take notes, who will review past discussions, etc.)
 - Identify a process where all feedback can be commented on by other members of the group. (*Balanced*)
 - A Typical approach to providing feedback might be:
 - Have each member state their observations (positive and negative).
 - Record key points made by each person.
 - Allow the each person to review their list and, with the help of the group, select the top 3 areas which require improvement.
 - Have each person clarify the most important outcome they wish to see from the situation.
 - Summarize and set targets for the group and each person.
 - Agree to follow-up date and coaching pairs to help each other.
(Another process is “Help/Hinder”)
 - Identify a means of tracking real results and accounting for them with a focus on the outcomes, consequences, and action plans required to improve. (*Connected to Consequences*)
 - Set a schedule and follow-up for feedback on a regular basis.
- Start process – try it, review it, learn from it, and get great performance!!!!