

Boss vs. Employee: Win-Win Management

I tell my boss when I think he's not performing up to par. He's asked me to.

He does the same for me; in fact he's made a commitment to do so.

Sounds very unorthodox for an employee-employer relationship, doesn't it? It's called the Win-Win Agreement.

Here's how it works: every six months, I draft up a thorough list of commitments I will make related to my job performance and achievements (from basic daily duties to mastering a new software program, for example). Then I make another list of support commitments that details ways in which I need my boss to support me, in order to perform well in my job (i.e. providing me with a User's Manual for the software I will be learning, down to simply giving me feedback on a regular basis). Together we review the commitments, and trim and mold them until we are both satisfied. Once they are finalized, we meet once a month, and rate ourselves and each other on our respective success in meeting each commitment.

I love this performance review system, which is a real first for me. It has many benefits for me as an employee, here's a few of them:

1. The first is that I feel I am more in control. I crafted the list myself; I am in charge of the commitments I make. Being independent by nature, I appreciate knowing ahead of time what I will be expected to accomplish in the next six months, and being able to pace my learning or projects according to a schedule. Conversely, I can suggest deleting a commitment if I feel the timeline for it is not realistic. I also know in advance what level of performance my boss will be looking for. We have specified rewards (ex: flexible schedule) or penalties (ex: stricter supervision) related to the commitments as a whole, so it gives me a specific goal to aim for. It makes me that feel that I am accountable in my performance to myself first, and that I own my job.
2. It's also a great solution for a conflict-aphobe like me. The two-way street of communication has already been established, and our one-on-ones provide an opportunity for discussing challenges and for airing grievances. If my boss is not entirely pleased with my performance in one area, it will not come as a shock to me when I hear of it. So there are no uncomfortable "I need to have a word with you in my office" moments. He may mention it casually, knowing that we can discuss it at length in our monthly get-together, where we can identify my challenges and brainstorm for solutions together. This system allows me to plan ahead for what I need to discuss with him, which is good, since my mind often goes blank when I am faced with stressful situations. Another

invaluable feature of the process is that, if done properly, there is no assuming or having to guess what the other person's needs or expectations are, thereby eliminating the inherent frustration produced by attempts at mind-reading.

3. The Win-Win Agreement can provide both of us with a reality check, as my boss and I learned in a recent review. If one party rates themselves high on the scale, and the other person rates them low on the same list item, it becomes obvious that they are not on the same page. This then affords us the opportunity to pinpoint the cause of the wide rift in perspectives, and establish new objectives. In this scenario, there is no blaming each other or storing up of ill-will, but rather a respectful and communicative exchange between two individuals with a mutual goal: satisfaction and positive performance in our role.

I have been surprised and pleased to find that my boss is both an excellent source of knowledge that can ease difficult situations, and a coach who cares about my state of mind. He knows that if I am unhappy, I will perform badly -- which reflects badly on him, as a manager, and is bad for the company's success -- and that I will likely quit before long, which means rehiring and retraining.

He also knows that if I feel *heard*, if my efforts and my accomplishments are valued, and if I am treated with respect, I will do more than asked. I will care to uphold the standards of the company, and take pride in representing it. And he knows that, ultimately, those are the conditions under which my job performance peaks.

Talk about Win-Win!

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If you want to know more about the Win-Win Management system, please email me at info@optimusperformance.ca.