

Guiding the performance of an analytical employee



Brian Tolle

One of the more challenging aspects of a manager's job is to guide the performance of direct reports. This can be particularly true when time is of the essence—when quick

response to rapidly changing market conditions is crucial. We often find these conditions in technology-based companies that employ large numbers of analytical thinkers. So here are some tips on how to set expectations or establish goals when working with employees in technical fields such as science, engineering and information technology.

One well-known and proven tool available to managers to communicate clear expectations is the S.M.A.R.T. criteria. Any goal will be that much more actionable and motivational if it follows these criteria: Specific, Measurable, Attainable, Results-Oriented and Time-bound. This is even more so when guiding the performance of employees who are analytical thinkers because they bring a

particular approach to their work that a manager needs to understand if he or she is to foster high performance.

In general, an analytical thinker is motivated by the opportunity to produce work that is thorough and high quality, to the degree that perfection is often his or her intended (though unspoken) goal. They often hold very high standards for themselves and naturally aim for a level of thoroughness and accuracy in their work that only themselves expect. Part of this motivation also lies in their desire to do the job right the first time. Whether tied to a desire for perfection or efficiency, they often work to avoid, or are put-off by, efforts requiring re-work. Therefore they have a natural tendency to dive deep into a topic or task, thoroughly researching it so that they feel they have covered all aspects of the issue (to the point they can sometimes come across as procrastinators). In their minds, this allows them to work out a plan that has a very high likelihood of success once they initiate the effort.

Therefore, guide the performance of an analytical employee by providing the

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employee with clear parameters to the task, responsibility or project. These parameters should include the scope of the topic, timeframes for completion, and expectations of the finished product. Specific timeframes, regardless of how short or long, are particularly helpful to the analytical employee because they allow him or her to "calibrate" their effort. A manager may feel that this

is micro managing and possibly insulting the intelligence of the employee and would prefer to provide general guidelines. By leaving the parameters vague, however, the employee can waste time distracted by the lack of parameters and can come across as unsure or lacking in self-confidence when they end up asking questions of the manager to clarify the parameters. In addition, don't be surprised if they need to re-evaluate completed analysis you provide them. Their motto: trust but verify. As you can see, the S.M.A.R.T. criteria would be quite useful when clarifying the parameters with an analytical-thinking employee.

Bottom line, give analytical employees clear parameters and watch them go to work.

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