



HRxaminer

*Examining practical HR issues business owners
and managers encounter every day*

Taking Action in 2014



I've been working with several clients to enhance their review forms and processes for giving feedback and evaluating individual employee job performance.

As many of us have experienced, avoidance is still the norm for handling employee feedback in many organizations.

It goes back to what I call the "Thumper Theory™ of Giving Feedback." Our parents taught us, and in the movie "Bambi", Thumper reminded us, "If you don't have anything nice to say, don't say anything at all." For fun, click here

[Thumper Video](#) and you can watch it as a refresher – you can't help but grin.

Unfortunately, when it comes to giving clear specific constructive workplace feedback, the "Thumper" advice is just plain wrong. But it's where many of us get stuck.

If you manage employees, you must provide honest feedback on which employee behaviors and actions are and aren't working for you, customers, coworkers and the business. How can your employees and organizations succeed if employees don't know what needs to change?

Once you've given the constructive feedback, especially to struggling employees, my recommendation is to take it one step further. Have your employees create their own Action Plan detailing what they're going to do to "fix" the issues that you've identified. If the employees develop their own plan, there's a greater likelihood of buy-in and success than if you create it for them.

One important realization is that employees don't always have the tools to hold themselves accountable to change. So that's where we blend the Action Plan with SMART goals.

Here's how it works:

- Each employee is "required" to write their Action Plan to address performance issues and/or set new performance goals.
- Their Action Plan must be in writing.
- Employees must break their plans into three (or more) categories, but at minimum the Plan must address the areas you define as core to enhancing your organization and specifically improving the areas you've identified.

- The core three areas that each Action Plan should include are:
 1. Financial – e.g., what will I actively do to improve the financials of the organization
 2. Departmental – e.g., what will I specifically do to improve how I contribute to my department, operations, productivity
 3. Developmental – e.g., what will I do differently to play nicely with the team, what will I learn to be more effective in my job
- To add some creativity to the action plan, you could add a fourth item:
 4. Fun – e.g., what am I committed to do to make this a fun, positive place to work.
- And of course, goals wouldn't be goals if you didn't ensure that each employee wrote them in SMART (specific, measurable, achievable, relevant and time-sensitive) format.

Don't let these "action plans" turn into "inaction." Add various levels of accountability to them.

For example, if you have every employee create action plans as a standard practice, have employees share their action plans (as appropriate) at your staff meetings and discuss where they are in achieving them. Meet more regularly with employees for a 5-minute update on their progress in these key areas. Show your employees that you take their objectives seriously and will hold them accountable to achieving them.

Creating goal-oriented action plans is an important step to help your team and organization to move forward. It becomes even more important when you have an employee with behavior or performance issues that need to be resolved.

And remember, don't let these action plans slide. Use them to guide your employees to success. And if your employees elect not to write and/or act on their action plan, well, then that tells you something very important as well.

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About Arlene Vernon

Arlene has provided HR consulting and management training services to over 300 organizations since starting HRx, Inc. in 1992.

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