

Is Torture Used in Your Workplace?



Does this photo remind you of performance review time in your company? I believe most employee performance review systems were modeled on the Spanish Inquisition of the 1480's. Back then, torture was used to extract the "truth" and coerce the future behavior of victims. Managers and employees are modern victims of poor review processes!

Good processes do some or all of these valuable things: tell the employee where they stand on the important expectations for their role, how those contributions connect up to company goals and what they need to do next to succeed. These are simple purposes. So, why do our systems fail so miserably?

The Problem

Problems come in several categories: 1) we measure the wrong things; 2) the review is really just the last hurdle before "my employees can get their raise;" or 3) the review is primarily a method to document performance problems and defend lawsuits. In other words, most review systems are more about a form, a checklist and an annual due date than real performance management.

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MY PREDICTION:

I bet you have worked hard to design a good process. It has some subjective measures and objective ones. There might be a place to rate progress or assign a number. It may even have a list of current goals from last year's conversation. It is signed, dated and in the file.

In too many cases the review does more harm than good. People are upset at the number they receive. Everyone expects "meets/exceeds." Real problems are ignored or glossed over. People are overrated. The even bigger shame is that opportunities to match employee activities to important company goals are lost. Finding ways to get there and chances for timely feedback during the year on progress (or lack of progress) are missing.



HOW TO PREPARE:

Too many performance review systems encourage managers to hide behind an annual review as "the time" they actually talk to an employee about their work, progress and career. Your employees are crying out for more conversations with their managers! Yes, there are dozens of short conversations during the year on what is going well ("Great job!") or what just went wrong ("Help me understand what you were thinking!"). There are precious few ongoing and interrelated conversations about the most important things.

How different would it be if managers had a scheduled one-on-one meeting with each employee once or twice a month to have real conversations? What has been accomplished since our last meeting? What is underway, what hurdles need to be removed and what do you need in order to be successful? Yes, good performance management is more about the conversation than the form. In fact, if there was no form at all (only notes kept by manager and employee) a series of robust and organized conversations will get more done than any form ever could.

Consider the simple choice of building a process and form that is focused on improving these regular conversations, not the other way around. Do you even need an "annual review" if you are having the right ongoing conversations?

There is a museum in Italy that would love to have your torture chair.

[Torture chair photo by Bruce Clarke at The Museum of Medieval Torture, Volterra, Italy during a 30th wedding anniversary trip with his wife, Diana. She would not go in the museum.]

Contact me directly if I can help you or your team.

Bruce

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