



How to Get People to Change Their Performance or Behavior: The Four Phases of Personal Development

"You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it within himself" -- Galileo

By Mac McIntire

Perhaps one of the hardest roles to fulfill as a manager is giving an employee feedback regarding their sub-standard performance or offensive behavior. Telling someone they are performing poorly or behaving inappropriately is not a task most managers relish. Yet it is one of your primary roles as a manager.

No doubt the greatest frustration in giving employees feedback is the fact that you can't get someone to change their performance or behavior unless they *want* to change. You can coach and counsel, push and prod, nag and threaten, but until a person accepts the fact they need to change, they usually won't. Your first challenge, then, in giving feedback is to get your employees to accept the need for change.

To get people to change their performance or behavior you first have to help them become conscious of their own actions. They must become *aware* that the way they are performing or acting is not appropriate. You must raise their consciousness so they can see, hear, and feel the impact of their actions or behaviors. Let me explain how this is done.

Make the Unconscious Conscious

I've received many compliments throughout my career as a management consultant and trainer, but two comments in particular mean the most to me. I believe those two comments encapsulate best who I am and what I do.

The first declaration was made several years ago after a strategic planning meeting I facilitated at a large corporation. The session went very well. It was one of those unique times when every executive in the meeting opened up fully and shared their deepest thoughts and feelings. When that happens learning is profound and meaningful. That day the depth of insight and understanding was intense. One could actually hear and see people's attitudes and behaviors changing in the room. For some of the participants the session was a life-changing experience. For the company the decisions and actions made on that day set the future tone for the business. That meeting made a difference in

people's professional and personal lives.

After that session the Chief Executive Officer of the company came up to me and said these words: *"Mac, do you know what it is that you do so well? You make the unconscious conscious!"*

His comment hit me like a bolt of lightning. That is *exactly* what I do! I draw out from the deep recesses of people's minds the hidden truths and insights they know, but cannot articulate. I cause people to discuss the things they normally refuse to discuss. I help people confront that which they cannot confront. I bring truth to the surface and set people and organizations on fire with that insight.

I'm often amused, but not surprised, at the number of clients who say the reason why they hired me as a consultant was because they knew they couldn't hide from me. They knew I would make them address the real issues, no matter how difficult. That's because no one is "safe" from me. I am no respecter of title or position. I will make people confront the tough issues. I will find truth wherever it lies and bring it into the open. I will make the unconscious conscious, for only when it is conscious can it be addressed. I make people put everything out on the table. I engage people who may not want to be engaged on issues they may not wish to confront, but need to confront to be more successful. I do so for the good of the whole, as well as for the good of the individual. When people address real issues in an open and realistic way, good things happen.

What I do as a consultant *you* must do as a manager. You too must raise the consciousness of your employees and address the tough issues. You must engage those who may not wish to be engaged. You must push those who may not want to be pushed so they can go deep within themselves and make the changes necessary to be more successful at work.

Get People to Internalize It

Galileo said, *"You cannot teach a man anything; you can only help him to find it within himself."* This is what I do. It is what you, too, must do to help others.

The second most meaningful praise I've ever received occurred at the beginning of an *Accountability Management Workshop™* I was facilitating. A woman was attending the workshop for the second time. I offered her my condolences for having to sit through the same session twice, since I always conduct the training the same way and tell the exact same stories each time. Her response surprised and pleased me, even though I've heard similar comments before.

"*You are like a good movie,*" she explained. "*Each time I watch and listen to you I learn more. Each time I participate in a meeting with you I get something totally different out of it.*"

A few years ago a manager at a large utility in California expressed a similar perspective. He has been through my *Team Start-Up Workshop™* seven times. The workshop is four days long. It's a great workshop and helps cross-functional teams achieve tremendous results, but 28 days of having to listen to me teach team skills seems like cruel and unusual punishment. Each time this manager brought a new team to the session I was embarrassed that he would be listening to my instructions and stories once again. But he too declared that it was worth it. He said each time he attended the session he "*got a little more out of it.*"

Then one day this manager came to me and said, "*Mac, I think I've finally got it! I've finally become what you preach. This IS who I am. I AM this team stuff!*"

This is who I am! Isn't that how it's supposed to be?

Customers want employees who *are* customer-oriented, not just those who pretend to be friendly. Employees want managers who *are* employee-centered, not just those who do it because it is good managerial technique. Companies want leaders who truly *are* leaders, not just those who blindly implement what they read in some management book.

Again, your job as a manager is to get people to act and behave in ways that are conducive to the business. You want people who perform well and do well because they "get it." You want people who do the right thing because doing what is right is who they are. You want your employees to become whatever it is you are preaching.

Four Phases of Personal Development

So how do you get people to confront their own actions or behaviors — to go deep — to bring about the changes necessary to actually become better individuals and more productive workers? You help them go through the *Four Phases of Personal Development™*.

Phase 1

To get people to change their behavior — to become what you want them to become, or, even more important, to become what they *need* to become — they first must "go inside themselves." They have to become introspective. They have to see themselves as they truly are. They must understand how they truly feel and discover in what they truly believe. They must know why they do the things they do. They must become conscious of their unconscious motives.

Thus, the first step to consciousness is **Self-Awareness**. Before someone can change, they first have to accept that a change is necessary. They must recognize something is amiss in the way they behave or act. They must see that what they are doing is not as effective or as helpful as it could be.

Note that the key to this awareness is that it must be *self*-awareness. Behavior change does not occur until an individual personally accepts the need for the change. Few alcoholics stop drinking until *they* want to. Family members can beg, plead and nag, but until the person accepts the fact that they are an alcoholic and need to change, they will not change.

Self-awareness usually occurs when something happens to cause the awareness. Some people recognize their off-purpose behavior when they recognize themselves in something they read in a magazine or book. Some learn from observing others. Some learn from their own mistakes; while others learn from the mistakes of others. Still others only learn when the consequences are severe enough to bring the problem to their consciousness. They don't see the need to change until something happens to make them painfully aware of the problem.

Life events and significant emotional experiences can cause self-awareness. Simple assessments found in magazines or offered in training programs can also heighten awareness. Personal feedback, management pressure, advice from a spouse, or a seemingly innocent comment from a child can make one aware. And sometimes it takes a good facilitator or therapist to help people accept what they refuse to accept without expert intervention.

Generally people are more convinced when they discover the need for change on their own rather than being given some rationale for change from someone else. But external factors or other people can be a catalyst to change. Your job as a manager is to help employees become aware of their actions by bringing the need for change to their consciousness.

Phase 2

Once a person becomes aware of their dysfunctional or off-purpose behavior, the sudden awareness can be overwhelming. It is easy for people who have become suddenly introspective to become depressed. Recognizing their faults, they now see themselves as being totally bad or completely wrong. But no matter how serious the discrepancy may be, the person still has value. And it's your role to help the employee see their continued value.

Even the most derelict employee is not bad all of the time or in every aspect of their job. How they act and what they do may be bad sometimes, but certainly there are other times when they behave and act well. There usually are times when the individual is effective and other times when they are not. This is why the second step to behavioral change is so important. You need to help the employee analyze all of the ramifications of what they do or how they act – both the bad and the good.

Therefore, after a person becomes aware of the need to change, they must go through [Self-Analysis](#) to determine what works regarding their performance or behavior and what doesn't. They must analyze where they are effective or ineffective, good or bad, helpful or not helpful, appropriate or inappropriate. This requires an honest assessment of one's strengths and weaknesses.

The self-analysis phase of personal development allows the person to assess where change is needed and where it is not. It provides a balanced view so they do not perceive their situation as all bad. It pinpoints specifically where the problem lies and what the person can do to change it. And it ensures the individual leaves their good qualities intact as they expunge the behaviors or characteristics that limit their success.

Phase 3

Someone once said, "*Strength is not the absence of weakness but how we deal with our weaknesses.*" To bring about change, therefore, a person must take the [Self-Action](#) necessary to make the improvement. They must deal with their new found shortcomings in an appropriate way.

Notice that it is *self*-action. No one can make the change for the individual. They must do it themselves. But the person may not know how to change. They may need help in determining how best to make the change. They may need tools or techniques that are not within their normal repertoire of skills or behaviors in order to bring about the necessary changes. They may require ongoing feedback as they adjust their performance.

They may need reinforcement, encouragement and coaching from you. This is your role as the manager.

Sadly some people never make the necessary changes in their life because, when they enter the self-action phase, they have limited tools or methods to help them make the change. For example, if you give an employee only one change management tool, and that tool doesn't work for him or her, the worker has no tools left to help them make the change. Consequently, the employee invariably reverts back to old behaviors.

The more tools and methods you give an employee to maneuver through the change process the more successful they will be in making the necessary adjustments to their performance or behavior. This is why ongoing coaching and encouragement is imperative when an employee is on a developmental plan. Similar to psychological counseling, an employee may need to return to one's manager for continued "therapy" as they make adjustments in their life. They may need to try a variety of improvement methods before they find the right solution to their performance or behavior problem.

Phase 4

The final step to personal change is [Self-Actualization](#). It may take many days – even months – before a person internalizes the change and actually becomes what they seek to become. In the beginning the person may have to consciously think about his or her actions and force oneself to do the right thing. They may stumble and fall many times before they are able to stand firmly on the new behaviors.

However, after the individual has performed the task successfully many times, eventually it will become easier to perform well without conscious thought. Once a person can perform the new tasks without having to think about them, he or she becomes self-actualized. They "become" the actions and behaviors they wanted to become. In other words, the new performance level or changed behaviors are now the new normal for the individual. It is who they are.

Additional Thoughts

Let me share some additional things you should consider when trying to bring about change within individuals.

People will not change their behavior until it is *imperative* for them to do so. Most people will stay in their comfort zone as long as it's comfortable. This means you may have to make an employee uncomfortable to get them to change. The self-

awareness phase is often an uncomfortable process because it forces people to look in the mirror and introspectively assess their weaknesses, deficiencies or inadequacies. But, people who spend too much time staring in the mirror can become fixated on their flaws. So it's important to quickly move to the self-analysis phase of the personal development process so the individual sees both the bad and good images in their self-reflection.

When the person moves to the self-action phase of their development you need to recognize even minor progress toward improved behavior. Too often, when someone says they are trying to change, people become hypersensitive to even the slightest indicator that the person is continuing their old ways.

I once worked with a person who was trying to control his irritation and impatient responses to others. It took great conscious effort on his part to bite his tongue and not lash out like he was known to do. There were numerous times when he was able to control himself, but occasionally his natural tendencies emerged. At those times people would say to him, "*See! I knew you'd never change!*" What they didn't realize is that he *had* changed – significantly. But it was impossible for others to know how many times he *hadn't* lashed out. They only knew when he had reverted back to his bad behaviors.

The best thing you can do when someone needs to change their performance or behavior is to provide encouraging reinforcement when they do. The process of becoming self-aware and then self-analyzing where one needs to change can often be difficult and even traumatic. The road to change and the actions taken to get there can be an uphill battle. People may need a great deal of reinforcement and confidence-building support to successfully implement the actions needed to make the change. *Your* supportive actions and behaviors, to a great extent, determine how successful your employees will be at changing *their* actions and behaviors.

As you've read, the process to get people to change their performance or behavior has four phases. You can accelerate the personal change process by knowing your role as a manager in each of these phases. §

Innovative Management Group offers management, supervisory and employee training course designed around the *Four Phases of Personal Development™*. We also offer one-on-one coaching and mentoring. We masterfully guide executives, managers and supervisors through the personal change process and provide them with a plethora of tools, techniques and methods to ensure their

professional and personal success. We then teach them how to help others succeed. Please contact us for a list of the customized training programs we offer.

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