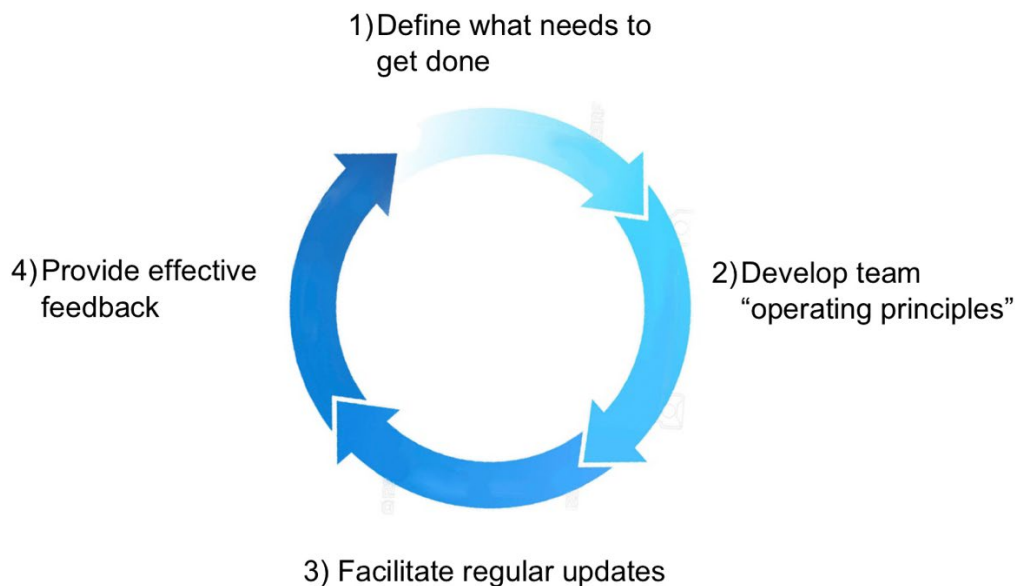


## FOUR STEPS TO MOTIVATING PERFORMANCE

This tool is aimed at helping managers learn how to motivate the performance of the people they supervise – both individuals and teams. It helps managers remember the key steps in the process – and how to foster accountability and follow through.

Motivating people depends on building both focus and trust. Focus comes with clarity of expectations. Trust comes with showing appreciation, communicating information broadly, showing vulnerability, and intentionally building relationships with people. When people are providing updates, asking questions, suggesting ideas, and admitting mistakes – those are signs that you’ve created an environment in which people feel motivated.

The four basic steps to motivating performance are shown below:



### Step 1: Define what needs to get done.

The cycle begins with you, the manager, defining what needs to get done. This is typically based on directions and expectations that you receive from your boss or on priorities stated in the organization’s strategic plan and action plans.

As you focus on what needs to get done, it’s helpful to collaborate and communicate with the people you supervise, get their input, and clarify any questions they have. By “leading through inquiry,” you can build buy-in for people’s assignments and deliverables. Here are some of the questions to ask:

- Are we clear on the longer-term goals we’re trying to achieve?
- Are we clear on the shorter-term tasks and assignments? (Typically, it’s helpful to break things down to what needs to get done on a weekly basis.)
- Are we clear on the absolute “must dos” – on the basic requirements?

- What resources do you think you need to get the job done?
- Who will you be depending on – and how will you collaborate with them?
- What are potentially conflicting priorities?
- What are ways to overcome those potential conflicts?

It is helpful to document these expectations in the form of an action plan or task list with deadlines. Various online project management tools can be helpful. Remember that goals, objectives and tasks are more easily accomplished when they are “S.M.A.R.T.”, meaning they are:

- Specific
- Measurable
- Agreed-upon
- Relevant
- Timely

### **Step 2: Develop team “operating principles”**

Team operating principles describe how people on your team are expected to interact with one another and communicate to build focus and trust. They should be developed collaboratively, with all team members participating in order to build buy-in.

Here’s an example:

1. This is a safe place to make honest mistakes. Tell us about them right away and we can work through them.
2. Consider the needs of the people you work with in your communication – and make sure your expectations are clear.
3. Share information. Err on the side of over-communication.
4. If we don’t agree, that’s okay. Disagreements can be healthy. Ultimately, however, someone has to make a decision.
5. Be responsive to one another; respond to emails and voicemails within one working day – even if it’s just to say when we can provide a more complete answer.
6. Recognize that we’re human beings, and we may not be at our best every day.

Team operating principles should be referred to frequently. They should be the basis on which you, the manager, hold people accountable to consistent standards of behavior.

### **Step 3: Facilitate regular updates**

Effective motivation and performance management hinges on regular, frequent meetings to discuss how things are going. Use the agreed-upon expectations and actions steps as the basis for regular updates and check-ins. It is recommended that they be weekly – or even daily.

The more regularly these updates occur, the more you will instill accountability and follow-through. Team meetings are important in order for people to ask questions, figure out who’s doing what, and organize their work. Your job at these meetings is to facilitate discussion by asking questions and listening: What has been accomplished? Where are they stuck? What can be done to mitigate those “sticking” points? Help them identify things within their control to change.

Part of clarifying expectations is also being clear about decision-making: What role does each person play in making a given decision? How are they supposed to make decisions? Consultatively? By consensus? The more you can clarify roles, the more effectively people can collaborate without creating conflicts over who's responsible for what.

#### **Step 4: Provide effective feedback**

The last step is to provide ongoing, timely communication and feedback about what the employee is doing well, and what areas need improvement and development. The manager should provide this feedback on an ongoing basis – and not wait for a formal appraisal.

Some guidelines to giving effective feedback:

- Provide appreciative feedback more often than constructive feedback. (The number one employee complaint is that they don't get recognized for a job well done.)
- Don't wait – "when you see it or think it, say it."
- All feedback should be specific. Use the "SBI" approach:
  - S: What was the specific situation?
  - B: What specific behaviors did I see the person demonstrate?
  - I: What was the specific impact?

When giving feedback, it's vitally important that the recipient trust that you are there to help them be successful, not to punish them. Check your emotional tone and guard against "emotional contagion."

- If you don't think people can get the job done, they will sense your lack of confidence in them.
- If you seem impatient, people won't believe you're trying to help them.

Before you hold others at fault for something they failed to do, remember to check your assumptions of your own competence. Ask yourself:

- Did I communicate the expectations clearly?
- Did I give people ample opportunity to share their concerns?
- What could I have done better?

Lastly, it's important that you also ask for feedback about how well you are doing. The more regularly you ask for feedback, the more readily employees will dispel their fears and view giving and receiving feedback as a positive part of the management process.

Ultimately, managers need to remember that the performance of other people ultimately depends on their own performance and accountability. By focusing on each of these four steps, you'll be doing the things to motivate people and build accountability.