

MEDIA REVIEWS

Reviewed by Lynda Ford for *Training Media Review*

There is mounting evidence, both anecdotal and statistical, that managers promoted from within their companies receive little or no training in basic communication skills. The following videos focus on how managers can communicate more effectively in two critical areas: praise and criticism.

Praise

Narrator John Cleese opens *Performance Matters: The Importance of Praise* by saying, "Everyone needs recognition and reassurance." But Cleese explains, praise is rarely part of corporate culture. The good news: Giving praise is a learnable skill.

The video then segues into several workplace vignettes. Enter Martin, a stressed-out manager who barks commands as he storms through the work area. Alone in his office, Martin talks to his ethereal mentor, who is the voice of John Cleese.

In the next scene, employees commiserate about their thankless jobs and Martin's bad management. For example, Karen tells the others about an incident when a visitor left some personal items at a meeting. Karen tracked the visitor down during her lunch time and returned the items. When Karen returned to the office, Martin disciplined her for taking a long lunch. Everyone agrees: No good deed goes unpunished.

Next, the audience watches Cleese convince Martin to offer praise and recognition. Martin enters the main work area and mumbles, "Good job." Cleese finds Martin's efforts useless. "Praising everybody for nothing isn't much better than praising nobody for anything," he says.

Using a seven-step process outlined by Cleese, Martin improves. By the end of the video, Martin is charging through the work area, conversing with and praising the people he passes.

Criticism

Don't let the word *criticism* discourage you. Cleese opens *Performance Matters: The Need for Constructive Criticism* by stating the obvious: "People don't want to be on the receiving end of criticism." Although there are formal venues for criticism, such as disciplinary actions

Performance Matters Videos

★★★★1/2	Holds viewer interest
★★★★	Acting and presenting
★	Diversity
★★★★	Production quality
★★★★	Value of content
★★★★	Instructional value
★★★★1/2	Value for the money
★★★★	Overall rating

or performance reviews, Cleese explains that most mistakes can't wait for discussion. He says, "The appraisal interview shouldn't be the first time a person hears about the incident."

Like the praise video, this one uses vignettes with the same cast of characters to illustrate effective criticism. For example, Karen is convinced by a peer to go home rather than check files that she's preparing for her manager, Martin. Fast-forward to the meeting: As expected, Martin can't find an important technical report. The meeting chairperson says, "You've really landed us in it this time, Martin." In the next scene Martin receives an email from the CEO reprimanding him for his incompetence.

Enter the voice of John Cleese who asks Martin, "Have you talked to Karen?" The answer, of course, is no. Though it's evident that Martin is loathe to broach the subject, Cleese convinces him to address it soon. Martin steels himself, walks to the work area, and publicly humiliates Karen.

Thinking he has done the right thing, Martin returns to his office, where Cleese explains vigorously what he has done wrong. Then, Cleese introduces rules of effective criticism. Through trial and error, Martin finally addresses the issue in a way that benefits all players.

Recommendation

The *Performance Matters* videos are quality products. The acting is polished, and the humor is finely honed rather than foolish. The main points are illustrated well and recapped often. The support materials are concise and easy to work with. The electronic workbook, leader guide, and overheads are customized easily.

RATINGS KEY

★★★★
★★★★1/2
★★★★
★★★★

Outstanding
Very good
Good
Above average

★★
★1/2
★

Average
Below average
Poor

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The only real failing is the video's lack of cast diversity. The US\$1,400 price tag for both videos is a little steep, but I'm certain that purchasers will get a lot of mileage from them.

Because these easy-to-use videos work well together, I recommend that you purchase both. Also, there's no limit on participants: This program can be customized to meet the needs of five or 100. Indeed, this might be the perfect solution for organizations grappling with how to improve the vital communication areas of praise and criticism.

Video details

Performance Matters: The Importance of Praise, *video, 2000*, and Performance Matters: The Need for Constructive Criticism, *video, 2000*, *Coastal Training Technologies: 877.408.5030, www.coastal.com. Purchase US\$895 per video, US\$1,400 for the pair. Other material: electronic worksheets and slides; workbook.*

Lynda Ford is president of The Ford Group; lynda@fordgroup.com.

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