

“FEEDBACK & OBJECTIVES”

Time and time again I have read articles and heard lectures which stress the value of *industrial objectives* in terms of increased productivity and/or employee output. It's not that I disapprove of objectives but that the rationale for objectives seems incomplete! A new employee related rationale should be included.

Incomplete

In the March 1973 issue of *Training and Development Journal*, Walter W. Palmer and Charles C. Dean present the article "Increasing Employee Productivity and Reducing Turnover." After reading this article, I frantically scoured the paragraphs for the human element in objectives, i.e., why objectives reduce employee turnover, indeed if at all. I submit: That objectives do reduce turnover only if the objectives are employee oriented!

I suppose we should start with the *purpose* of objectives. In the school system, objectives were established to give a visible direction and an objective method of

measuring performance based on the goal of instruction. The goals were incorporated in objectives for the benefit of the instructor. However, objectives proved beneficial to others as well.

During the short period I was teaching in the school system, I found my direction and goals were clear because of the objectives. Because I was certain of the goals, I was able to sort the superfluous from the essential. Success became a common occurrence, not just for me but for my students. It was obvious my students were succeeding because they could visualize the goal, the outcome, the product. With a clear goal, the student could see the chance for achievement, thus the objective

became a source of motivation (Figure 1).

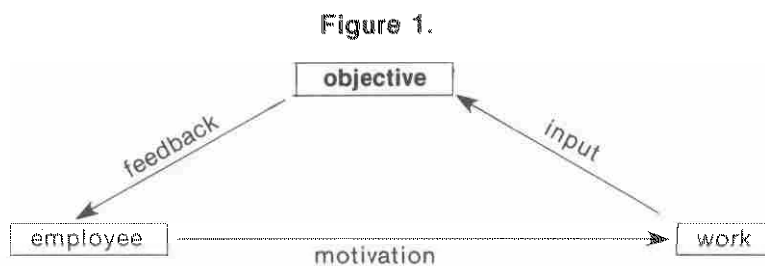
We can relate this to industry. The objective is the product, the student the employee, and the learning the work. The motivation derived from the feedback becomes another helper in reducing turnover.

Management's Role

In the article mentioned earlier, Dean and Palmer present an excellent example of performance measurement.:

1. Each employee meets with his or her immediate supervisor and reviews progress and problems in achieving objectives.

2. Each supervisor meets with his or her department head and



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reviews the progress and problems encountered in the implementation of departmental objectives and the individual objectives of employees.

3. Each department head meets with the assistant plant manager and reviews the progress and problems encountered in the achievement of his or her department's objectives.

4. The assistant plant manager coordinates the objectives of the departments and reports on the progress and problems to the plant manager.

5. The plant manager considers the report of departmental units when reporting to the board of directors.

6. The board of directors reviews progress made toward achieving the goals, and either revises the goals or suggests corrective action for the organization, so as to achieve the goals.

The *incompleteness* occurs in step No. 6. It appears that if progress is made, then the sequence ends.

I don't believe the authors had this intention. To clear up the

discrepancies, it should be made obvious that if achievements are made, the acknowledgements should be passed directly to the employees. This is to make sure the employee is conscious of his or her achievements.

Produce Feedback

One of the main causes for the existence of objectives is that they produce feedback — or should.

Feedback works in many directions. To managers, it provides an unbiased method of evaluation. They can look at employee production in terms of per cents, numbers, fractions, values and amounts of all types. They must then interpret these measurements in terms of human elements such as job satisfaction and motivation. As soon as they have a thorough understanding of the human elements, they must report back to the employee. Let the employee know where they stand objectively via production and efficiency. The manager should then make a subjective evaluation — the employee's motivation, attitude, friendliness; these factors do

enter the realm of job satisfaction and thus, production.

To the employee, feedback from the manager shows where the employee stands. His or her goals are within reach. They are finite, clear and attainable. Again, a source of motivation and an incentive for sticking with the job, a reduction in turnover.

Methods

To make sure the employee is conscious of his or her accomplishments, management can do several things:

1. In a written acknowledgement, mention specific jobs performed.

2. Point to the specific job in relation to the whole product. Show the importance of the small task.

3. Organize jobs so that each employee produces the entire product (or at least can put the finishing touches on the product). This gives him or her a sense of accomplishment.

These methods all relate to an essential part of management's obligation, i.e., feedback to employees.

Feedback is like a river that changes its direction of flow with the tide. A static condition cannot exist. Feedback is the power to clarify objectives, to stimulate communication and to motivate people!

James R. Butterworth graduated from Florida Technological University with a B.A. in Education. He has been with the training department of the Boeing Aerospace Company at Kennedy Space Center for two years as an instructor/supervisor. He taught communications courses for the Management Development Program and is presently developing a "Writing Improvement Program" for engineers.