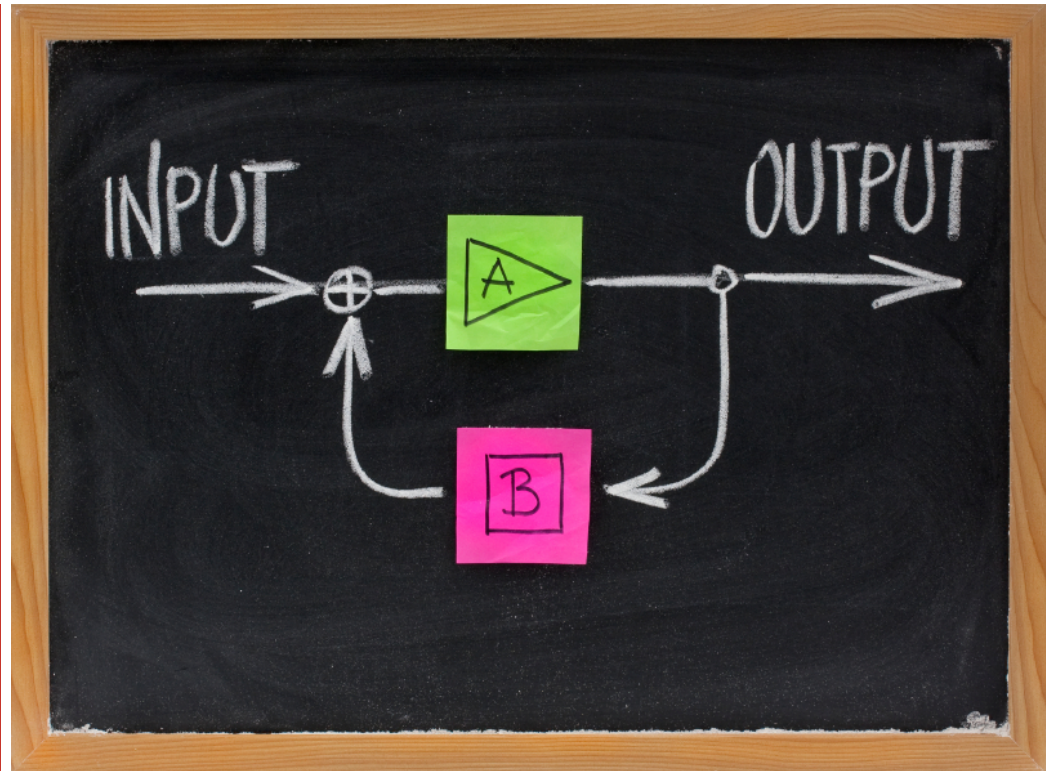


June 13, 2010

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Employee Peer Feedback Loops

An approach to self-directed personal development

By Paul Klipp

It was [The Last Lecture](#) that finally did it for me. I'd been thinking about implementing some kind of 360 degree review process at my company for a year now, but differing opinions on how such processes should work kept me from taking a decision. Some employees were nervous about any deviation from the review process that had proven itself by getting them hired and setting their salary at a level which is obviously satisfactory. Any change could, possibly, be for the worse.

My problem, though, as a manager, is that I'm not as close to every employee as their teammates and I lack the technical skills to give them effective direction in terms of finding paths to improvements in the fine details of their technical skill development. I had a lot of ideas for 360 degree feedback, but they all hinged on the wrong thing. They were based on finding a way that I could help my employees better develop their career skills.

The epiphany came while reading *The Last Lecture* by Randy Pausch. It's not my job to improve my employees. It's my job to hire and motivate people to want to improve themselves. If I do that, then I don't have to improve them; I just have to provide them with the tools to improve themselves. One powerful tool is peer feedback. By removing myself from the process, I can remove all of the fear and stigma attached to management-directed 360 degree employee feedback programs.

Anyone who has read any of my recent articles knows that I don't spend much time on theory. I prefer to get right to the meat and potatoes and provide useful ideas. So here's what I've come up with after several iterations.

Employee Peer Feedback Loops

An approach to self-directed personal development

The new peer feedback system I've devised is entirely employee-driven, optional, and anonymous. I've made it paper-based so that it leaves no trail that management could be tempted to follow. When an employee wants peer feedback, they take a piece of paper with three almost identical sections and cut it into thirds. Each section looks like this:

For the first four questions, answer with a number between 1 and 5 in which 1 is the worst and 5 is the best. When you have finished, give this form to: _____

How well do I collaborate with a team?

How dependable am I?

Are my technical skills developing quickly?

Am I a pleasure to work with?

What one thing do you most admire about me?

What one thing would you like me to work on improving?

They give one to a person whose views they respect. They give another to someone whom they can trust to know well the people who know them best. The first person has instructions to fill in the form. The second person has instructions to give the form to someone of their choosing who they think could provide valuable feedback to the employee, but not to tell anyone who they gave it to. Both reviewers give the finished forms back to someone generally trusted and preferably not a member of management by dropping them into a box which is not opened until both forms are returned. That person could be someone in HR, another team lead, an administrator, or really anyone that is trusted by the whole team and separate from the performance review and promotion process. That person then uses the third copy of the form to write the average of the two numbers from the first forms and to combine the responses to the last two questions. He or she then destroys the original forms (a paper shredder is handy here). The final combined form is handed back to the employee who initiated the review.

The advantages to this approach are:

It's anonymous. No one knows who filled in which form. The employee being reviewed knows that someone of his or her choice had a huge impact on the final number and can be reasonably sure that the other person was chosen for their ability to give good feedback, too.

It's untrackable by management. Managers need not even know that it's happening and they certainly can't know the results. The only two people who know the results are the trusted person who combined the data and the employee who requested feedback, and the only evidence of the process is safely in the hands of the employee who requested to be reviewed. They employee can use or ignore this feedback as they choose.

It's fast. The questions are general and aimed at giving general feedback with only one or two specific suggestions, on the assumption that a person can't work on changing very much at the same time.

Conclusion

I've just tried on myself, and I haven't gotten the feedback yet. I'm sure there will be some improvements as I implement this system and get feedback about it. I plan to do that via an anonymous survey using Google forms. I'll incorporate the feedback into a final version of this article. You can send feedback to paul@paulklipp.com. I'm eager to hear your ideas.