



What Motivates, What Doesn't, and Everything in Between



This Month's Focus:

Coping With The Poor Performer

What do employees say or do when their leaders confront them with reliable information that indicates they are not performing in accordance with expectations? Research shows their responses will fall into one of these categories:

- Denial. Sometimes this is a knee-jerk reaction, and often an employee's first. They may argue the facts. It's a self-protection reaction.
- They hide it. This reaction sometimes follows denial or is chosen because denying poor performance isn't possible. This is not unlike the child who breaks a vase then hides it under the bed in the hope he may not be discovered.
- They justify it. If it can't be denied or hidden, poor performers will likely *rationalize* their shortcomings. You may hear the poor performer say something like, "Well, it could always be worse."
- They allocate it. This is a shifting of responsibility to someone, perhaps anyone, else. It may not even be a person. Perhaps all of us have heard these words uttered by a frustrated parent: "Look what *you* made me do!" That's an

allocation.

Why do poor performers offer these responses? Research concludes it's likely that one or more of the following conditions existed:

- Expectations of performance were unclear.
- The belief that acknowledging poor performance and having it known publicly will be punished.
- An absence of performance-related goals.

How do we cope with the poor performer?

- Go beyond merely telling someone what not to do. Identify the critical aspects of the job or task that must be performed correctly.
- Ensure we can distinguish what effective performance looks like when we see it.
- Set specific performance goals (as opposed to “do a good job”, or, “work hard”).