



# Performance Coaching

*If your actions inspire others to dream more, learn more, do more, and become more, you are a leader.*

—John Quincy Adams

Over the years I have attended and taught many management and leadership classes. I have also received and written countless performance reviews. I have overseen the ratings and reviews for literally thousands of employees, starting when I ran a call center for a large retailer back in the late 80s, before I attended graduate school. One thing that is clear to me, after so many years participating in these annual and semi-annual corporate rituals, is that there is the potential for considerable ambiguity, particularly when assessing soft skills, those that cannot be measured using hard metrics such as the ability to meet deadlines or deliver revenue commitments.

This ambiguity makes it hard for employees to understand how to meet their manager's expectations. It makes it hard for them to understand the factors that may be limiting their progress from a junior player in the organization to a more senior role. I believe this ambiguity can be clarified, although there will probably always be some qualitative differences in perspective between employee and manager, and even among different managers.

For these soft skills, I believe performance *coaching* needs to be emphasized over performance *management*. This is because at many organizations, performance management focuses primarily on promoting the fittest and eliminating the weak. The process looks at who is getting the best ratings and who is getting the worst. Managers then work to remove the lowest performers from the organization. This selection process is a natural cycle, and one that should continue to play a role. However, I believe that coaching can yield better long-term results, both for individuals and for the organization. Coaching focuses on helping everyone in the organization, including ourselves, reach their full potential. The ultimate goal is to create a high-performance organization in which everyone performs to the utmost of his or her ability.

To effectively coach people, we need to be able to define the soft skills that are required at each level of the progression from entry-level employee to executive. Then we can coach them about how to acquire these skills and move up the organization. The tables in this chapter are intended to provide those definitions, to provide some clarity in these areas of potential ambiguity. They are based on tables that I have used, adapted, tested, and refined over many years in a wide variety of roles. Although I created the

tables for my own employees, the skills listed in the tables are not specific to information risk professionals; they may be equally applicable to employees in other disciplines.

The soft skills in the tables generally describe *how* people work, which can be almost as important to the organization as *what* they do. How people behave and communicate affects not only their own ability to achieve goals but also the performance of those around them. An individual contributor who interacts poorly with others may impair the performance of his or her team, and cause interpersonal problems that the team's manager has to spend time fixing. A senior manager who lacks these soft skills can have an even broader impact, hindering the performance of the organization.

I have published older versions of these tables to my employees, in the belief that feedback should be multi-directional and that leaders as well as employees should be measured using the same publicly available criteria. I have also shared these tables with industry peers. I am providing them in this book in the hope that they will be beneficial to others, and that they will generate comments and feedback that I can use to improve future iterations of this living document.

## How to Use the Tables

Each of the 11 tables in this chapter focuses on a specific area of soft skills, such as initiative, commitment, professionalism, or communication. Each table follows the same format, with five columns representing the skills required at progressively higher levels of the organization, from junior employees to emerging executives. The leftmost two columns represent individual contributors: entry-level employees and more seasoned intermediate professionals. The rightmost three columns represent increasingly senior management positions: a line manager responsible for a team; a senior manager who may be responsible for multiple teams, each headed by a line manager; and a leader who is responsible for an entire information risk organization and should be able to work directly with the company's board and top executives.

As one might expect when discussing soft skills, this is not an exact science. The columns show a progression, but they do not represent a precise scale, and there is overlap in some areas. An implicit assumption throughout the tables is that someone in a more senior role has already acquired the skills needed in less-senior positions (i.e. in the columns farther to the left). The skills required at more junior levels tend to be more narrowly defined and constrained; those required at more senior levels tend to be broader in scope, with more far-reaching impact. For these reasons, the tables may be easiest to absorb by reading down the columns (to see all the skills for each role) rather than across the rows.

Over the years, I have used these tables in various ways. I have used them to help employees understand where they need to enhance their skills and abilities if they want to move up to more senior positions. I've also used them to help employees self-assess. Here are some examples of ways to use the tables in everyday work situations:

- An employee believes he or she should be promoted to a more senior position. You ask them to assess their own skills in each area. You also do your own assessment of their skills. Then the two of you discuss any differences between those assessments, and pinpoint areas that the employee should work on in order to acquire the skills needed for a higher-level position.

- You provide an entry-level employee, enthusiastic but fresh out of college, with a roadmap of the skills they'll need to acquire if they want to progress to VP level in the future. This gives them a practical tool that they can use to guide their personal and career development.
- You use the tables to identify your own Achilles' heel, the weak spot that hinders your progression to an executive level. You notice that even though your skills mostly match those in the Emerging Executive column, the skills in a few areas correspond to those that you'd expect in a more junior manager. Those are skills that you need to improve.
- During a coaching session with an employee, you count roughly how many of their skills are already at the next most senior level, the next column in the table. If 80% of their skills match, they may be ready to move up. If there's only a 20% match, they need to work on bringing the rest of their skills up to scratch.

The tables cover the following areas: independence and initiative, efficiency and effectiveness, commitment, professionalism, discipline, teamwork, problem-solving, communication skills, and goal-setting.

## Independence and Initiative

This category, as its name suggests, is all about someone's ability to act independently and take the initiative. As you'd expect, the expectations increase dramatically as one progresses up the organization. An entry-level employee may require very specific direction for each new task. A more experienced employee (Intermediate) should be able to define action plans and complete small projects with minimal supervision. A line manager should take responsibility for leading his or her team. An emerging executive can deal with tough issues at executive level, and take responsibility for risky independent decisions that he or she believes are in the best interest of the organization. See Table 11-1.

**Table 11-1.** *Independence and Initiative*

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
Takes direction and turns it into results; assumes ownership of deliverables	Acts independently with a specific charter	Embraces role as manager to lead his/her team; sets direction in support of higher level goals	Seeks, identifies, and solves problems while taking responsibility for the outcome	Makes risky independent decisions and takes responsibility for the outcome

*(continued)*

**Table 11-1.** (continued)

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
Handles multiple simultaneous tasks with some supervision	Responds creatively to customer needs	Effectively summarizes and reports team’s activity	Takes unpopular positions and makes them happen	Deals with tough issues, with no “air cover,” at an executive staff level
Identifies roadblocks and resolves or escalates	Shapes problem statements and defines action plan to complete assignments	Holds self accountable for work he or she doesn’t directly control		Can foresee and take action on problems that do not yet exist
Works with manager to establish workload priorities, clarify expectations, and get feedback	Requires only minimal direction for small projects	Assumes responsibility for work that requires attention, even if it is outside direct scope of his/her role		
Identifies value-added activities and sometimes initiates actions	Seeks buy-in from manager on workload timing and prioritization	Drives risk and security charter among other managers across the organization		

## Efficiency and Effectiveness

Efficiency and effectiveness are both important, related skills. An efficient employee works quickly and uses fewer resources. An effective employee is highly productive. A company that combines effectiveness and efficiency achieves better results faster, using fewer resources. Table 11-2 shows the progression from an entry-level employee’s ability to follow efficient processes to a manager’s ability to manage the resources of a group or an entire organization.

**Table 11-2.** *Efficiency and Effectiveness*

<b>Entry-level</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Line Manager</b>	<b>Senior Manager</b>	<b>Leader/Emerging Executive</b>
Works at consistent and predictable pace	Schedules work and communicates timelines for output	Delegates appropriately; gets results by working through others and with others	Manages strategic planning and organizational scheduling, and makes good tradeoffs for the organization	Recognizes that what you say “no” to is as vital for driving organizational efficiency as what you say “yes” to
Demonstrates effective work habits enabling timely completion of tasks	Demonstrates ability to manage to multiple work items with inter-dependencies	Plans, schedules, and balances resources among projects to avoid crises and minimize fire fighting	Manages administrative resources to increase personal efficiency	
Learns from mistakes and applies learnings to subsequent tasks	Remains calm and in control of work demands while maintaining work/life balance	Devotes time to improving group’s efficiency	Dispositions items and issues quickly	
Works with manager to prioritize workload	Understands priorities, plans accordingly, and makes real-time adjustments	Uses project management tools and stakeholder input to maximize output and leverage resources	Communicates, and demonstrates through his/her own actions, that people are rewarded for results, not hours worked	
Begins to question time spent on routine tasks with low added value	Networks with others to identify shortcuts and efficiencies	Actively prioritizes by weeding and feeding the project list to maximize organizational effectiveness		

## Commitment

Commitment reflects someone’s loyalty to the organization and their willingness to devote time and energy to the cause. In an entry-level employee, commitment is demonstrated by personal work ethic and willingness to take on more work. As people move up the organization, they demonstrate commitment by taking ownership of bigger issues and focusing on driving the best outcome for the organization. See Table 11-3.

**Table 11-3.** *Commitment*

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
Demonstrates strong personal work ethic	Aligns individual goals with organizational goals	Drives issues for the benefit of multiple groups across the organization	Holds self accountable for company’s performance	Becomes a role model, demonstrating strong sense of “company first” with the right corporate social responsibility
Readily takes on more workload within job scope	Takes ownership of problems	Recognizes what is best for the organization versus what might be best for the department	Demonstrates a high level of dedication and personal commitment to the success of all employees	Tolerates the indirect control and influence that result from matrix management
Answers the specific questions asked (doesn’t drift)	Provides complete answers to questions; anticipates doubtful areas and works to eliminate concerns	Demonstrates commitment to work/life balance: creating a good home life as well as a good work life	Demonstrates that growth never stops and that we all need to continually learn in order to improve	
	Makes specific requests for necessary information; asks only for what is needed	Knows when to quit on a losing decision but willing to risk self to do the right thing	Subordinates ego to the needs of others and of the company	

## Professionalism

Professionalism is the extent to which someone demonstrates the attitudes, skills, and methods required to execute their professional role. For an entry-level employee, this includes adhering to established company policies. For senior managers, it involves demonstrating broader and deeper adoption of the company's values and principles. See Table 11-4.

**Table 11-4.** *Professionalism*

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
Demonstrates pride in his/her craft	Sets high personal standards	Modifies behavior to embrace corporate values	Demonstrates unquestioned confidentiality and adherence to the organization's code of conduct, values, and principles	Becomes a role model exemplifying corporate values, growth, consistency, integrity, composure, respect for others, and accountability
Has a courteous and businesslike manner, demonstrating understanding of basic values, role, and appropriate behavior	Holds self accountable for his or her actions	Matches actions with words	Demonstrates strong integrity and motivation with the most honorable intentions	
Respects confidentiality of information, with strict adherence to confidentiality policies	Maintains composure and is not defensive		Aggressively seeks feedback and coaching to grow into a role model	

## Discipline

Discipline is the ability to remain focused and execute consistently despite the many distractions of everyday working life. As employees rise to higher-level positions, the distractions and demands increase, requiring greater focus and discipline. See Table 11-5.

**Table 11-5.** *Discipline*

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
Approaches work in an orderly fashion	Consistently maintains high standards of accuracy and thoroughness	Stays on point, even with heavy distraction	Demonstrates the stamina and fortitude to remain focused and not succumb to premature conclusions	Prevents the organization from getting distracted
Consistently meets routine deadlines and executes well	Consistently documents intentions and results	Can discern urgency from importance, and prioritize accordingly		Understands the value of “silver bullets” and uses them wisely
Overcomes basic snags and remains focused to stay on course and deliver expected outputs	Does not initiate or perpetuate wasteful communication	Doesn’t waste energy on rhetoric or reactions that lead to no meaningful conclusions		
Demonstrates progression to greater discipline over time				

## Teamwork

Individuals must be able to recognize the need to work with others as a team, share expertise, and take on suitable team roles. Managers need to create, inspire, and lead teams, utilizing each member’s talents in the best way. See Table 11-6.

**Table 11-6.** *Teamwork*

<b>Entry-level</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Line Manager</b>	<b>Senior Manager</b>	<b>Leader/Emerging Executive</b>
Comprehends the importance of teamwork	Willingly shares knowledge and leverages expertise with others in team	Recognizes and assembles appropriate team players; encourages diversity and utilizes each member's unique talents	Sponsors and leads teams across broad entities	Commissions teams to solve broad, long-term problems
Requires some coaching on appropriate level of team involvement	Independently determines and executes appropriate team role and level of involvement	Provides training and coaching to his/her team  Actively engages team members and others to generate win-win solution  Recognizes when a team needs course correction  Willing to make personal sacrifices for the sake of the team	Nurtures multiple teams within an organization  Inspires teams to achieve an extraordinary level of performance	Becomes a key player within the executive team

## Problem-Solving

Problem-solving is an important skill for any information risk management professional. Individual contributors need to be able to analyze and solve problems. Managers need to help their teams solve problems and focus on broader issues including those that involve other organizations. See Table 11-7.

**Table 11-7.** *Problem-solving*

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
Solves problems with coaching	Takes ownership of problem resolution	Coaches teams to solve problems	Resolves complex problems across the organization	Resolves strategic problems, particularly those involving external parties
Understands cause and effect	Drives analysis of cost, benefit, risk, and probability of success	Identifies and resolves problems not obvious to others, including those beyond his/her previous experience	Champions enduring improvements through structured approaches such as task forces	Identifies proactive and predictive processes to identify the consequences and solve the problems of broad business initiatives
	Uses available resources and solid methodology to solve problems within charter	Uses consultative and consensus processes with ease		Acts as role model for commitment to previously agreed process improvements designed to systematically solve problems

## Communication

Good communication helps organizations thrive. It is essential in almost any role, from entry-level team members who must communicate with their colleagues and managers to executives who must communicate messages to the entire organization. Because communications skills are so important, I’ve divided them into three areas, each with its own table: listening, style, and clarity.

## Listening

Communication starts with listening. For junior employees, the ability to listen helps create a clear understanding of what’s required. More senior employees actively solicit multiple viewpoints, listen for the meaning behind the words, and intercept emotional outpourings that can overwhelm a situation. See Table 11-8.

**Table 11-8.** *Communication Skills: Listening*

<b>Entry-level</b>	<b>Intermediate</b>	<b>Line Manager</b>	<b>Senior Manager</b>	<b>Leader/Emerging Executive</b>
Confirms understanding	Listens to the broader meaning of what is being said, and seeks opportunities to add value	Hears frustrations and seeks advice about how to respond	Can hear beyond emotion and respond with meaningful commitments and actions	Finds the practical solution amid the noise from team members and executives
Makes listening an overt activity	Listens to others' ideas, and incorporates them into the work; demonstrates respect for others by ensuring their entire message is heard	Seeks others' perspectives and listens to all viewpoints and ideas; encourages mutual understanding	Steps back during debates and identifies the key issues	Can listen to strong-willed or irrational requests and provide appropriate direction
Listens and responds to customers and stakeholders	Adds information or perceptions to expand the concept or the opportunity	Reinforces understanding through active listening; builds confidence in others that their message is being heard	Intercepts escalating emotion before it overwhelms a situation involving other employees or customers	
Before ending conversation, summarizes conversation and achieves closure and agreement	Comes to meetings prepared to review the data and communicate information in a logical fashion  Knows when it is better to listen than to talk		Smoothly cross-references prior conversations to ensure truth and consistency	

## Style

How you communicate can be as important as *what* you communicate. Each person’s communication style should develop to match their role as they progress through the organization. See Table 11-9.

**Table 11-9.** *Communication Skills: Style*

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
Communicates well with others without creating confusion or unnecessary conflict	Delivery of analysis is comprehensive, instructive, and easily understood	Recognizes the requirements of each situation and adapts style accordingly	Demonstrates patience, persistence, and polish in communications	Develops own motivating style
Responds willingly and capably to direct verbal or written questions	Detects when someone is trying to direct them in a conversation and can follow as opposed to veering off track	Remains composed under pointed fire	Maintains a professional demeanor under pressure; can deflect “fire”	Has perfect timing; times communication for maximum impact
Interactions with others are viewed positively; other people do not avoid working with this person	Recognizes and is not deterred by different communication styles	Seeks and responds effectively to feedback on own management behavior	Credibly responds to questions when he or she doesn’t know the answer; can bluff but remain directionally correct or say “I don’t know, but I’ll find out”	Can make and communicate decisions on the fly with high precision and without disrupting other activities
		Uses post-mortems effectively	Says the right thing at the right time	Creates and delivers “state of the union addresses” and “one voice responses” for medium-sized and large organizations

*(continued)*

*Table 11-9. (continued)*

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
				Knows when to tell (give direction) versus lead, and does both things well

## Clarity

Clear communication helps ensure that information and ideas are accurately shared throughout the organization. Experienced staff should be able to summarize data and create clarity from a confusing mass of information. Senior managers create consistent and clear messages for diverse audiences. See Table 11-10.

*Table 11-10. Communication Skills: Clarity*

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
Keeps messages clear and concise	Focuses on and highlights key points	Tells the story, not the facts; delivers the core meaning and the answer (what actions to take) when appropriate	Takes multiple messages from various sources and reconstitutes or links them into a larger, more meaningful message	Sends clear and consistent messages to a broad audience, including external parties
Presents facts accurately, using relevant data	Remains clear about the goal and does not meander—stays on point	Draws summary conclusions from large amounts of information	Creates consistent and clear messages despite complex scope of material	Helps people from different backgrounds quickly grasp complex subjects at a high level
Independently determines areas that need clarity, and seeks and adds appropriate details	Demonstrates awareness of target audience, and tailors message accordingly	Brings clarity to complex situations; asks the right questions to lead the conversation to results, and avoids stating opinion up front	Lean communication: uses the minimum number of words to express a point	Brings clarity to issues across multiple organizations who may have opposing interests

*(continued)*

**Table 11-10.** (continued)

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
Keeps work neat and well organized		Is aware when he or she has confused senior management	Does not confuse executive management	

## Goal-Setting

All experienced staff should be able to identify and set goals, from line managers setting goals for their team to leaders defining the organization’s mission. See Table 11-11.

**Table 11-11.** Goal-Setting

Entry-level	Intermediate	Line Manager	Senior Manager	Leader/Emerging Executive
Drafts individual goals and reviews with manager for approval	Identifies and declares opportunities	Set goals for team; ensures goals are clear and stated in terms of measurable results	Sets strategic as well as tactical goals	Creates missions
	Presents compelling data to support recommended goals	Aligns goals and expectations with upper management	Demonstrates ability to set goals when starting with a blank sheet	Challenges self, staff, and peers to take on increasingly higher leverage objectives
	Anticipates needs and requirements	Provides a degree of focus on strategic issues; demonstrates vision in areas of expertise	Can drive an organization to articulate commitments, maintain focus, adjust priorities, and raise the bar	Can drive consensus on vision
		Fosters innovation and creative thinking; encourages discussion and feedback in setting goals	Challenges existing paradigms and explores new possibilities	Helps others make the connection between the vision and the deliverables necessary to achieve the higher goals

## Conclusion

I believe that performance coaching focused on soft skills can help everyone in the organization achieve their full potential, and thus contribute to the creation of a high-performance organization. I'd like to conclude by examining what makes a manager an effective performance coach. A good performance coach

- Develops and mentors managers and other employees, managing people to higher expectations and greater results.
- Stretches others and themselves to achieve beyond the norm, and rejects mediocrity.
- Creates more key players than he or she consumes, becoming a net developer of people for the organization.
- Holds people accountable for results and coaches them to achieve those results.
- Distinguishes motion from progress, and separates the means from the end.
- Responds positively to feedback about his or her own behavior as a manager or individual.
- Is sought out to provide performance coaching to senior players who report to other managers.
- Handles tough conversations with employees about their behavior or performance crisply, without creating a litigation risk.
- Saves senior players from self-destructing or falling short of their potential.
- Demonstrates empathy and can save employees who are struggling due to work-related or personal reasons and might otherwise leave the organization.