BY PATRICK IBARRA

A RECIPE FOR SUCCESS

Seven factors for high performance

> "Perfection is not attainable, but if we chase perfection we can catch excellence."
> —*Vince Lombardi, football player and coach*

It's not simple to identify what is considered quality public-sector performance. Finding the answers to some crucial questions is the most important step toward a disciplined approach to high-performance government.

Is more always better? Governments tally lots of inputs and outputs, but it's a mistake to suppose that increased number of patrons attending events, larger capital expenditures, or more citations issued translate to improved government performance. Nor does the opposite—declining number of patrons, fewer citations, smaller capital investments—necessarily signify poor performance.

The fact here is that it's not simple to determine what constitutes successful or unsuccessful public-sector performance. The challenge is pinpointing what exactly quality performance, and thereby success, actually means.

Defining Employee Success

Even more challenging is defining what employee success looks like. How do you know when employees are performing exceptionally? In my consulting work for local governments, I have frequently observed a significant disconnect between job descriptions (what people are hired to do); performance appraisal instruments (what people are evaluated against); and daily conversations (what people are advised to do or as I say, "conversations are the oxygen of priorities").

This lack of integration creates confusion for employees and their supervisors about how to focus their time, effort, and energy. Determining the priority areas for what employees should be working on is often overly complex. Remember, one of your roles is to serve as a member of the organization's "performance chefs" who is busy in the kitchen creating a recipe for employee performance and organizational effectiveness.

Being mindful that the best predictor of future performance is past performance is essential for leaders, managers, and supervisors to collectively determine the recipe for successful employee performance.

Moreover, consistent with my observations that some employees step up while others simply show up, and remembering the principle that "hiring is like dating, you get what you're looking for" and people do not fundamentally change, using the recipe is critical when making hiring decisions, including promotions.

If you have ever made a hiring decision that did not turn out like you had planned, I know my previous statement resonates with you.

Two important reminders:

- Being a good team player is not a universal definition. It must be defined within each organization and work group.
- Your focus should be on performance and not personality. By the way, stay far away from personality inventory indicator assessments of candidates as part of the hiring process. Those instruments have no predictive value.

Recipe for Success

Here is my "Recipe for Success: Seven Factors for High Performance" and characteristics describing each:

- **Attitude.** Get past the platitudes of positive and can-do. Those are clichés and are not descriptive. Instead, how about resilient, curious, prudent risk-taker, problem solver, and a high degree of self-awareness. Sets the performance bar high and never settles.

- **Behavior/conduct.** Confident decisionmaker, mature, takes initiative, follows through, courteous, self-accountable, confident, and takes responsibility.
- **Knowledge.** Understands and executes his or her role and how it fits into the big picture. Invests in staying current to maintain a contemporary knowledge base. Fluent in change.
- **Passion.** Demonstrates a passion for public service. Builds and maintains healthy relationships. Brings out the best in people.
- **Performance.** High quality, of course. Completes work on or before deadlines. Excellent communicator. Continuously proactive.
- **Skill set.** Versatile and resourceful.
- **Values.** Exhibits, at a minimum, honesty, integrity, and trustworthiness. Values people because nothing is more evident than when an employee, especially those in leadership roles, do not value people.

I encourage younger readers to invest time with senior leaders in their organizations and to use the seven factors, customizing each factor to reflect their preferred workplace culture and the role of employee performance to support it.

After this has been completed, craft a set of interview questions to gauge fit with candidates and how well an individual is aligned with performance expectations. Refresh the performance appraisal instrument and offer training and learning workshops for supervisors and managers on how to optimize it to ensure employees are performing against the criteria necessary for organizational effectiveness.

I urge readers to e-mail their questions and comments to me. **PM**

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