

## Ch4 | Sense of Urgency

# The Four-step Self-improvement Plan

When someone on my team was struggling and standard coaching, motivation and training had not been successful in turning around their poor performance; I would use this four-step process for creating a very specific, clear, quantifiable and measurable performance improvement plan.

The power in this approach is getting the employee to state, in their own words, specifically how they will improve their performance over a specific set of time. What makes it so effective is that because the improvement plan was written by the employee, it is exceedingly difficult for them to come back at a later date and claim that they did not understand what was expected of them, or what the ramifications of failing to meet those expectations would be.

When an employee is not meeting standards and delivering the required results, simply call them in and ask them to fill out the following four memos. Make sure that they understand that it is essential that they put in as much specific, quantifiable, measurable information as possible, so that it is crystal clear exactly what they will do differently – and what they need from you in order to deliver the results they are promising. Once you receive the four memos from the employee, you can work together to negotiate some of the finer points and clarify anything that might be ambiguous. Once you both agree on the content of the memos, you and the employee sign each of them as a clear commitment, almost a contract, that both of you will work hard to deliver what is required of you in each of the four memos.

Then schedule a brief meeting each week with the employee to go over the four memos and see where they stand on each. The first memo is what they have promised to deliver, so you can discuss how they are improving and what results they are achieving. The second memo talks about what they need from you in order to successfully achieve the results they have promised, so at this point you can make sure that you have given them all of the resources, support, equipment, and help they need in order to successfully deliver on memo number one (results). Memo number three simply states what they expect as a reward if they successfully complete everything on memo number one – it might be a raise, flex time, a better parking spot, more vacation... or just keeping their job. Lastly, memo number four outlines what the negative ramifications will be if you deliver everything on memo number two (resources) and they are not able to deliver what they have promised a memo number one (results). Typically, most employees list termination as a result of not achieving their goals.

It has been my experience that folks either get down to work right away and dramatically improve their performance, or within a matter of just a month or two they realize that even though you have given them everything they requested on memo number two (resources) – there is no way that they will be able to deliver what they have promised a memo number one (results)... and soon decide is best to just resign.

## Self-improvement Plan

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*Memo One:*

### Deliverables

In as much detail as possible, please clearly outline specifically what changes/ results you will deliver over the next four months. It is critical that you make these deliverables as measurable, quantifiable and observable as possible – so it will be absolutely clear to both of us exactly what you are promising to deliver and what changes you're promising to make. Think this through very carefully, make sure that your goals are challenging, but realistic –and totally unambiguous so that when we look at them a few months from now there is no confusion whatsoever as to whether you have achieved these goals or not.

*Memo Two:*

### Required Resources

Based on the goals for improvement you listed on memo number one, what are all of the resources, support, help, training and equipment that you might need from me (that you do not have now) in order to successfully achieve all of your goals? I want to help set you up for success, so please let me know what I can do to make sure you have everything you need to keep your promises from memo number one.

*Memo Three:*

### Rewards

If you are able to successfully deliver everything you have promised on memo number one, what should your reward be?

*Memo Four:*

### Ramifications

If I delivered to you all of the resources and support we have agreed upon on memo number two, and you're still not able to deliver on your promises/ goals on memo number one, what should the ramifications to you be?