

Communicating Changes

to your Performance Management Approach

By Keith Kitani, CEO of GuideSpark



Among the many repercussions of a dangerous, global pandemic, many companies have had no choice but to change their overall business strategy and goals, as they've adapted to each new hurdle they encounter. On top of these major changes, the manner in which many of us work has shifted dramatically; many employees (and entire companies) have gone remote, and organizations have undergone significant digital transformations, making dramatic changes to traditional processes and systems overnight.

As a result, the strategies we drafted at the beginning of the year don't quite match up with what our new priorities are in this environment – both for whole organizations as well as individual employees.

Looking ahead at assessing employee performance for 2020, a major challenge will be balancing the goals and objectives we planned for with the reality we've experienced.

Find new ways to evaluate performance

The first step for many organizations will be in deciding whether to proceed with their performance process as normal, completely throw them out the window, or find a middle ground; rethinking and reimagining a new way to evaluate performance. For example, if your company's major objectives in 2020 took a formal or informal detour, how will you measure your employees' efforts toward those goals? And thinking specifically about employees' personal objectives for the year – if they weren't updated along the way, how will you evaluate performance according to goals that no longer apply? Then, you'll need to consider the structure and format of the reviews themselves – will you proceed with a traditional approach to formal performance reviews, or opt for something more like an informal check-in?

In evaluating employees' work over the course of the year, understanding the scope of their efforts and skills might require closer look than managers are accustomed to. Rather than simply appraising the achievement of goals set in January, leaders should be looking to understand the

deeper context of everything their team has achieved – and overcome. How will you acknowledge – and reward – employees' efforts during the pandemic from a performance management perspective, especially if evaluation criteria has changed? Looking at the retail sector as an example, [many employees have transitioned away from brick-and-mortar customer service](#) to more of a virtual support role – having to learn and develop new skills on the fly. On the other hand, many employees of all industries have had to move to a completely remote work environment, now having to balance a whole new suite of distractions; handling childcare or homeschooling during work hours, sharing a workspace with a spouse or roommate, and in many other ways blending their personal and professional lives. If your company re-goaled this year, or made a similar move to a remote workforce, how will you measure performance – whether productivity has decreased due the pandemic, or if employees' recent efforts have helped you get through this transformation more smoothly?



Communicate Your New Performance Approach

Once you have a plan established for performance management, you'll need to strategize how to roll out these changes to your employees. Orchestrate a clear communications plan that will serve to both comprehensively educate people leaders, as well as inform and engage your broader workforce.

More volatility in the economy has inherently made a large impact on overall business and company performance, which means we're facing a large number of challenges and obstacles around how employees can be rewarded. Every company is different, and many of us are facing diverse economic effects – even within a single organization. We're seeing companies deal with different challenges for each business unit; some doing well, and others that are struggling – which ultimately leads to different departments evaluating and rewarding employees differently. Recently I spoke with Larry Brand, CHRO at Elkay Manufacturing, who has noted the drastic differences this pandemic has had on the two major divisions of his company; one that has seen a boost in demand, and the other that has been struggling more than usual. He's essentially needed to come up with two different communication plans, one for each division of the organization.

No matter the scope of changes you're making to your performance management approach this year, effective communications will be the key to a smooth, successful transformation. A strategy like the following will help you take on performance reviews with your employees' buy-in on your side:



Align your workforce.

Due to the varied impact across the business landscape, communication needs to be targeted and clear to each of your employee populations, who may be experiencing the effects of the pandemic extremely differently. Depending on who is receiving your messaging, you'll need to craft a communications plan that strikes the right tone for their situation. Your personalized messaging can make all the difference when it comes to encouraging a sense of transparency and trust, and getting employees in all situations on board with your program.



Reach and engage employees where they are.

Performance management is essential to a business; you need to ensure you're truly reaching your employees with your messaging. Now more than ever, you're competing for time and attention with other platforms, not to mention their personal lives. Exciting, consumer-grade content is the best way to engage your workforce in a virtual environment. And, using different, varied distribution channels such as email, text, virtual company meetings, or Slack and MS Teams messaging will help to further overcome the noise of competing communications.



Empower people managers.

Even if employees' goals were accurate for the year, there remains a huge challenge in actually assessing performance as many of the traditional methods, often informal, haven't been available in a remote environment. We're working in a context where we no longer have the ability to check in at someone's desk, and many people managers were never equipped to manage remote teams. Encourage people leaders to provide real-time feedback and more ongoing communication to feel more connected to their teams, as well as more prepared for comprehensive performance reviews. To do this, they'll need resources from leadership about how to conduct a virtual performance management experience; Consider frequent, targeted messaging, or helpful performance conversation guides to prepare them for your new approach.



Think Long-term

It's an understatement to say that employees have been through a lot this year – as leaders, now is the time to be sensitive and empathetic in regard to the challenges we have all faced. As we continue working during the pandemic, and start to emerge at the other side, companies will need to create and envision a performance management process that's flexible and adaptable enough to handle the gravity and scope of change that we've seen in 2020.

Change is inevitable, and it's also constant – organizations will need an approach to performance, as well as a communications strategy, that carries us through these known challenges, as well as those that are still unknown.

Ultimately, an agile performance approach will help you keep your focus where it matters: the hard work of your employees through unprecedented times and beyond.

About Keith Kitani

Keith Kitani is CEO and co-founder of GuideSpark, a change communications software company. He brings over 20 years of digital communication, e-learning, and technology expertise to lead GuideSpark as it enables organizations to manage, measure, and scale their internal communications effectiveness to drive organizational change and achieve business goals. Keith's career has been focused on building companies that develop digital solutions to connect people and information.

About GuideSpark

GuideSpark, Inc. is the leading provider of change communications solutions designed to drive strategic and organizational change. GuideSpark Communicate Cloud® is the first HR communications software platform designed to manage, measure, and scale your communication effectiveness. GuideSpark combines technology and internal communication expertise to deliver unique solutions that have helped over 1000 enterprises transform their HR program engagement and drive strategic change.

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