

A Case Study:

The Benefits of Using 2+2 Coaching & Feedback with Front Line Food Service Workers

PROBLEM: Employees report performance feedback is given infrequently and they're not sure what they need to do to advance their careers within the company

The Workplace Organizational Health Study sought to improve the health, safety, and well-being of front line food service workers, by identifying working conditions that could be modified to reduce pain & injuries and improve worker well-being. The study focused on three working conditions – safety and ergonomics, work intensity and job enrichment.

Through interviews with multiple levels of management and focus groups with front line employees, researchers learned this fast-paced and challenging work environment left little time for on-going one-on-one performance feedback outside annual performance reviews. Managers and leadership emphasized the importance of recruitment, engagement and retention of skilled employees, yet many front line workers indicated that they often did not know what they could be doing differently to earn more money and/or advance within the organization. Both managers and employees identified an opportunity to improve this type of communication, while acknowledging the challenges presented by the multiple demands on a manager's time, exacerbated by staffing issues, last minute catering orders or unexpected client requests.

SOLUTION: Implement the 2+2 Coaching & Feedback model with front line food service workers

In discussions with the organization's Human Resources leadership, researchers identified an existing 2+2 Coaching & Feedback model with a well-developed overview and conversation planner that was already being used when providing feedback to management level employees. With minor modifications, it was introduced as a resource to use with front line food service workers as part of this organizational change intervention. By using an approach that had already been successful at this company, there was an "organizational fit" that was critical to acceptance and utilization when implemented with this different population.

The 2+2 Coaching & Feedback model is based on a fifteen-minute conversation, ideally once each quarter, during which the manager and employee discuss two things the employee is doing well and two things the employee could be doing more or less of to enhance or improve performance or career growth. The conversation concludes with the manager and employee agreeing to specific actions and next steps, including a plan for follow-up. The 2+2 conversations work because they're short, simple and scripted. This approach incorporates concrete feedback, thereby making easier what might otherwise be a difficult conversation.

Operationalizing essential elements

Throughout this study, we incorporated essential elements that we deemed critical to the success of our intervention. These are listed below along with how they were operationalized with this resource.

- **Leadership commitment:** We had buy-in from HR leadership to use the 2+2 Coaching & Feedback model with employees, based on its use for providing coaching and feedback to managers.
- **Communication:** 2+2 Coaching & Feedback encourages short, frequent conversations between managers and workers – aligned with senior management's goal of enhanced communication.
- **Organizational fit:** 2+2 Coaching & Feedback had previously been used in other parts of the organization and at different levels, so was already aligned with the organization's culture.
- **Teamwork/worker input:** 2+2 Coaching & Feedback encourages improved two-way discussions and invites employee participation and input.

IMPACT:

Where this was successful

The study locations that implemented this tool found it to be useful for structuring coaching and feedback, and saw the benefits of more frequent and more impactful conversations – one site noted an increase in employee engagement and cross-training as a result of some initial conversations. Employees welcomed the opportunity to discuss what they could be doing more of or be doing better and what skills they might want to develop in order to take on more responsibilities. Managers appreciated that the guidance for use was concise and included tips and tools that were easily implemented.

Where there were challenges

Although all of the managers involved recognized the value in using *2+2 Coaching & Feedback*, some managers did not start using this resource during the study, due to time constraints and competing demands.

APPLYING KEY LEARNINGS:

After assessing working conditions critical to an employee population, it’s important to then identify tools and resources that will address the root causes of these working conditions in a way that is consistent with the organization’s culture. The tools and resources have the potential to positively impact the outcomes of interest, if implemented effectively and consistently with participation from both managers and employees.

The Workplace Organizational Health Study

The Workplace Organizational Health Study is a collaboration between a large multinational multi-layered company that provides food service through contractual arrangements with corporate clients, and the Center for Work, Health, & Well-being. The goal of this project (funded by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health, Grant No. OH010811) is to explore feasibility and potential efficacy of changes in organizational policies, programs and practices on worker safety, health, and well-being in food service settings.

About the Center for Work, Health, & Well-being

The Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health Center for Work, Health, & Well-being is one of six NIOSH Total Worker Health® Centers of Excellence. The Center’s integrated approach to achieving organizational change focuses on addressing working conditions that in turn impact outcomes, both for employees and employers. The Center develops and evaluates interventions that introduce practices, programs and policies to improve employees’ safety, health, and well-being in high-risk industries, using Total Worker Health® approaches.

For more information

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