

Increase your possibilities with 360-degree feedback

by Andrea Salvemini, *The Personnel Perspective*

“What would you attempt to do if you knew you could not fail?” ANONYMOUS

What a question! What a world of possibilities that it opens! What are those possibilities if not the potential for doing or becoming something in the future? What holds us back from meeting our potential? Failure or fear of failure can be a huge barrier to moving forward.

In organizations, fear of failure and individuals' inability to reach toward their potential may make the difference between an organization that succeeds in all facets and one that never seems to reach its goals. It may mean the difference between the employee who is energized, innovative, and a valuable contributor and the employee who is just “surviving” and doing the minimum in order to skate by.

How can we create an organization that thrives on embracing new possibilities and constantly searching for improvement? How can we bring this spirit to our managers and leaders, to individual contributors at all levels?

By providing individuals with opportunities for growth in a culture that values ideas and open communication channels, we can create the organization that will move beyond the fear of failure toward new and exciting possibilities. One of the simplest, yet most powerful ways to do this is by using 360-degree feedback. When utilized properly, 360-degree feedback assessments can help individuals realize their potential by providing them with clear, constructive feedback from many sources.

What is 360-degree feedback and how do you know if it is right for your organization? Providing 360-degree feedback is a method of gathering information about a manager's performance from peers, direct reports, and his or her boss. When used properly, it is a tool that can help the individual understand others' perceptions about how they do what they do. It also provides valuable feedback on the participant's self-perception and how this compares to others' perceptions.

These 360-degree feedback assessments can aid participants in narrowing the gap between how others see them and how they see themselves. It can be used as a platform for open communication and provide a critical springboard to discuss tough issues. It can strengthen a

team and assist in creating a plan to achieve strategic goals and objectives. If not used properly, it can intensify unspoken issues and create unrealistic expectations. Following the right process, however, will create rewards that will last indefinitely.

How can you maximize the impact of your 360-degree feedback? There are several key steps that will assure that your process yields positive and impactful results.

Utilize an experienced professional

We strongly suggest utilizing a professional management consultant who has had experience with 360-degree assessments, coaching, and feedback in order to implement these assessments at your winery. Having an outside party administer the process and provide the feedback can make a huge difference in how effective the assessments will be. If the results are reported and compiled outside the company, participants and raters are likely to be more honest in their feedback, as it will “not be held against them”.

The following questions can serve as a guide to make sure that the process and results enable you to achieve your goals.

What are the results that you want to achieve by using a 360-degree feedback instrument?

It is important to be clear about what outcome you expect from the instrument. Do you want your managers to become better leaders? Do you want your managers to become more skilled in communicating with their team? Is turnover high in your organization and do the managers have the skills to select and develop the best talent? Is conflict dealt with in a constructive manner? A 360-degree assessment can be a huge catalyst in improving results in all of these areas, and the key is clarity before the process starts. This will determine what questions you ask during the assessment.

What do you want to measure?

There are a huge number of 360-degree assessment tools available to choose from. Once you are clear on the results that you want to achieve from the tool, you are better equipped to determine what the best method to measure is.

Instruments can measure leadership style, personality and behavior, and job-related skills and perspectives. They can measure how people communicate information, the level of risk-taking and innovation that an individual has, how individuals influence others, and how they deal with pressure, etc.

PERSONNEL POINT OF VIEW

You can use a standard assessment or you can create a custom one based on the organization's leadership model or what the role of the leader is in your organization.

Here are a few other things to consider when choosing your assessment tool:

- Is the tool valid and reliable?
- Is the tool easy to use?
- Are the results easy to understand and utilize?
- How are the results reported? Are they presented individually by rater or in an aggregate form?
- Are the raters anonymous?
- Do you want an online version or paper-and-pencil version?
- Is there a development-planning guide or workbook?
- Are you able to see comments from the raters?

Are the participants ready to do the work?

Participants need to be open to giving and receiving feedback. They need to be able to look at their strengths and developmental areas and be willing to make a commitment to work on their developmental areas. The organization can support their efforts by coaching, training, and different programs. Examples include work/life balance programs, cross-functional teams, and reorganizations.

What can we do to make the process effective and assure that the results are being used?

a. Pre-assessment orientation and planning session — Participants must be clear as to what the expected outcomes of the process are, what the process entails, who their raters should be, and how to use the feedback. It is important that the individuals know what to expect, so they see "possibilities" instead of "fear."

b. Coaching and feedback sessions — Feedback can be given to individuals in an individual coaching session or group feedback session. The method chosen depends upon the results desired and the areas that are measured. It is important for the results to be delivered and discussed in a constructive and coaching manner. Delivery and coaching by a professional coach or human resources consultant aids in the anonymity of the process and increases receptivity of the participant. Ideally, the coach will be the consultant who has administered the entire process and is familiar with the individuals and their challenges.

c. Link to development plan — Results can be linked to each individual's personal development plan. It is suggested that each person pick a maximum of three areas

to work on and then create specific action plans with target dates for completion.

d. Accountability — Creating a way to hold each person accountable for his or her development plans and actions is important. If participants know that a process has been set up that will hold them accountable to work on their developmental areas and show results, the carry-over for the process will be much stronger than if no process is set up.

When is the "right time"?

After you determine what results you would like to achieve from implementing a 360-degree feedback process in your organization, you can look at timing. If the participants are ready to do the work and consider making improvements, the time is right. It is important, however, to keep the 360-degree feedback process separate from the performance review process.

The performance review is based on *measurable results* and can have significant consequences for the recipient, while the 360-degree assessment is oriented toward individual growth and development. It is based on *perceptions* of the participant's performance from a variety of people, not just the recipient's supervisor.

Performance reviews can be used for individual development as well, yet the "360" will not measure the results that are needed in a performance review.

Results from 360-degree feedback assessments can be astounding. They can open doors to new and exciting possibilities for individuals and organizations. By taking the time to do the work up front, and committing to the developmental process after results have been given, you and your managers can avoid failure and turn possibilities in to realities.

Andrea Salvemini is the Director of Business Development with The Personnel Perspective, a human resources consulting, training, and recruiting firm in Santa Rosa, CA. Since 1987, The Personnel Perspective has been a leading full-service human resources consulting firm in northern California, helping companies leverage their greatest asset — their people — by recruiting, training, and motivating them. The Personnel Perspective assists organizations in implementing successful 360 degree assessments. Andrea can be reached at 707/576-7653 or direct 415/499-5696.