

**Trusting the Process: Maintaining Culture in Times of Uncertainty**  
**Part 3: Performance Management**

Richard Gold: You probably don't know this. I have taught an MBA class at the University of Buffalo for the last seven years in workplace performance management. So I've always had a sort of affinity and an interest in people performance management, particularly in the workplace. One of the things I do every year in the first lecture is to talk about how much Corporate America can learn from professional sports teams. When you look at a sports team like the Bills, every single player knows exactly what's expected of them. You measure activities and outcomes like crazy. You were talking about thigh size earlier. I mean everything has a measurable outcome as you're preparing for success. There's absolutely no debate about what that success looks like. Every player gets immediate and I am presuming frequent feedback in terms of how they're doing against a mission. And most importantly, you make tough decisions and you make them quickly. I don't know of many workplaces that could describe themselves in exactly that way. Brandon, maybe talk to us a little bit about the performance management system that you rely on to create the activities and behaviors that will ultimately lead to success?

Brandon Beane: Yeah, Rich. It's very important. I'll start with players, but you have to do this with your staff as well, is you do have your own -- we talked about onboarding and core values and things like that earlier and setting a culture. But you've got to constantly give feedback. And I don't think it's -- I know sometimes companies do from the calendar year, a once a year review. Me personally, I think once a year is not enough and I think you have to be able to give one-on-one feedback, group feedback, and you have to do it at various points throughout the calendar year.

Richard Gold: We talk a lot about the fact that if we provide our people and our organization feedback once a year through the annual process, we've wasted basically 11 months and 29 days of ability to help people get better. You never want someone at the end of the year to say, geez, if you'd mentioned that in February, I would have had a chance to get better. You guys, with the nature of your business, you can't afford that much of a lag time between observing performance and then providing feedback. I suspect you never get used to sitting across the table from someone and telling them something they probably don't want to hear. But if you treat

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everybody with dignity and respect the way you and Sean do, as part of your system, I think you preserve the culture even for people that you have to part ways with. And I'm sure some of those people you part ways with, and you feel horrible about it because they're strong leaders, culture carriers, but maybe they just can't perform to standard anymore. And then you've got the superstar that just won't fit in and you don't want to make that short-term decision for the short-term good but sacrifice the culture over the long-term. Which is what we talked about earlier. It's really fascinating. Do you ever get used to sitting across the table from somebody you really care about and giving them that kind of news? I can't -- I know it's tough for us.

Brandon Beane: No, it's very hard. But again, Terry and Kim hired me and Sean to provide a winning product. And if it gets to the point where the player is not good enough, it doesn't matter, it could be my son, it could be a close family friend, a player that's played for me for 10 years, your career is only going to last so long. And my job is to do the best job for the Buffalo Bills and to pick the 53 players that give us the best chance on opening day to start our season the right way and hopefully that 53 for the whole season. And so you're right, sometimes there's very tough decisions. People you get very close to that you have to make the difficult decision. But again, if you're honest and you treat them right, they may not agree with you that day. They may say, I've had it before, players told me you're making a mistake. But you see them two months down the line or you text them or whatever, and eventually they come around and they always seem to respect, most of them do, that you shot them straight. And they realize, you know what, I was at the end of the line. It was tough for me, I laid it all the line, and I just didn't see it at the time, but I see it now.

Kim Pegula: Rich, on our business side, we do what we call coaching sessions. We did it three times a year, now we do it three, sometimes two. But what it really is, is to sit down with your direct report and very similar, just to assess and align. Make sure where are areas that we're looking for you to focus on? What are areas you need to work on? What areas are you doing really well? And we found that staff want feedback. They want to know where they are. They want to know how they're doing, good or bad. But this, by having these coaching sessions throughout the year, you're giving them, like you said, an opportunity to get better. And I think that's what staff really want. They want an opportunity. They want to know that there's room for growth. And they want direction. Because that's going to make

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them just a better employee and then they feel like then they're part of helping the whole organization as a whole.