

# How to Write an Up-Front Management Agreement

In last month's column, I outlined the benefits of having "Up-Front" relationships between managers and employees. The starting point to this type of open and productive relationship is a clearly written Up-Front Agreement.

The management situation is vastly improved when there are objectives and Up-Front Agreements between the manager and each employee.

## The benefits of such an environment are:

1. The manager and the employee both know exactly what's to be done and how it will be done.
2. Results can be measured; all those involved know when they've won.
3. The manager knows how to train and the employee is free to learn.
4. The manager has guidelines for management, and the employee knows how to respond to commitments they've made.
5. Paperwork, length of meetings, topics discussed, and hours worked are all relevant to the agreement. Time and effort are never wasted.

Establishing an Up-Front Agreement doesn't mean that people don't care for each other. An agreement doesn't exclude emotion or caring about personal problems. Quite to the contrary, it means that you care enough about one another to be specific about what you will do about your caring.

An Up-Front Agreement is an agreement between two or more people to accomplish specific objectives in a definite manner. To be most effective, it must be written and signed by both parties. A workable, Up-Front Agreement has these specific characteristics:

### 1. It Contains a Goal.

The goal is the purpose of the agreement, so state it clearly at the beginning. The goal is one that both parties want to reach; one which will be mutually beneficial. When the goal is achieved, both the manager and the employee will have reached personal goals, and the company will also benefit.

### 2. It is Specific.

If the agreement can't be measured, it can't be managed or fulfilled. Generalities don't work in an Up-Front Agreement. What and when specific actions will be done and how they will be done must be spelled out. The specifics include such things as:

- A. Results expected.
- B. Expected work to achieve the results.

### 3. It is Realistic.

A good Up-Front Agreement relates past performances to expected future actions. This means it's in the realm of achievement by the individual employee and is believable – but it also calls for growth. For new employees, set a minimum performance needed to be successful.

### 4. It Has Target dates.

The Up-Front Agreement must include the dates by which commitments will be reached or dates upon which progress will be evaluated. An agreement covering a very short period of time may not need any check date other than the final target date. However, write longer agreements to include appropriate intermediate check points for both parties to examine progress.

### 5. It is Stated Positively.

All goals and commitments are stated positively in an Up-Front Agreement. Don't focus on behavior or actions you want stopped. Instead, isolate positive behavior and actions that you prefer to see.

### 6. It Contains Expectations.

The Up-Front Agreement contains both the manager's and the employee's expectations. These are things that add to personal satisfaction. If an expectation will help you and the employee work together better or work more efficiently, then include it in the agreement.

#### A. A manager's expectations -

Include anything in the agreement which managers expect from employees that will help them manage more effectively. When employees know how to communicate well with their managers, they will do better in such things as:

1. Meeting a specific level of work that the manager knows from experience will get results.
2. Replying to all requests for information.
3. Keeping an agreed time schedule.
4. Carrying out an agreed-upon decision. After something has been discussed and agreed upon, the employee acts on it.

#### B. The employee's expectations -

Include things that help employees work more comfortably and efficiently. **Consider the following:**

1. The type of personal relationship. An atmosphere of mutual respect is essential. No one wants to be reprimanded publicly, for example. Results suffer while egos recover from their bruises and hostile attitudes abound. An agreement might say the manager will keep his temper and apply criticism

and/or coaching in a private meeting, not in a training meeting.

2. Work schedule. If an employee has an unusual work schedule, but one that experience has proved to be effective, agreements about following a schedule may be included even though it differs from the usual pattern.

### 7. It States Rewards and Penalties.

If the agreement clearly states the rewards for achieving the agreement and the penalties for failure, there's no need for a manager to act as a disciplinarian. Results are merely the natural fulfillment of the agreement; both parties merely carry out their agreed actions. This helps to avoid surprise reactions by both parties.

### 8. It Has a Tracking System.

The agreement spells out what's expected in the way of keeping track of progress. List items such as reports, meetings, memos, and other measuring sticks which the employee is expected to complete and turn in regularly. Be sure the agreement states exactly the information that's required, the form in which it will be reported, and due dates.

### 9. It Is "Livable."

An Up-Front Agreement is comfortable for both parties. This is possible after negotiation clarifies the needs, goals and commitments of both parties. Neither the manager nor the employee should sign an agreement unless they're both in agreement. If unable to negotiate a mutually beneficial and agreeable arrangement, they cannot work together successfully.

Having a clearly written Up-Front Agreement is the beginning point for effective management. It's analogous to the saying, "an ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure." By investing a small amount of time at the beginning of a management relationship, you will save enormous amounts of time, energy and frustration throughout the relationship. You will then be acting proactively instead of reactively to every situation.



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