

## Improve Performance by Re-focusing Attention from Tasks to Vision

By: Pat Lynch, Ph.D., President

Compare the motivation between an individual who goes to work thinking, “I get to help make my community a safer place today,” vs. one who thinks, “I’ll probably have to go out on over 20 calls again this shift.” Now think about how those diverse perspectives are likely to affect employees’ expectations about the day as well as their interactions with others, attendance, and engagement. Which group of employees would you rather have working for you?

Employees who have a clear line-of-sight between the tasks or functions they perform and the “big picture” of public safety are able to see the agency’s vision and articulate clearly the contribution they make to achieving it. However, it’s more common to find people who cannot connect the dots between their tasks and the vision.

What percentage of your employees have a clear line-of-sight between the tasks or functions they perform and the “big picture” of public safety – i.e., a safe, healthy, economically viable community? If you don’t know, there’s a quick and easy way to find out: ask them, “What is your job?” People who respond by describing their ranks/titles, their functions, or their tasks do not see the connection. Those whose answers refer to the vision understand not just the big picture, but also the value they bring to the job.

Improving performance begins with connecting your employees with the agency’s purpose. Here are six steps you can take to make that

happen:

1. Begin with yourself. How would you respond right now if asked, “What’s your job?”
2. Co-create with your employees a vision for your agency.
3. Communicate the vision at every conceivable opportunity – e.g., during morning line-up, around the kitchen table, and in agency newsletters.
4. Communicate to each employee clearly how he or she specifically contributes to the vision. Test his/her understanding by periodically asking, “What’s your job?”
5. Ensure that all of your systems support your message that each task/function/job makes an important contribution to public safety. For example:
  - o Individuals’ actions are aligned with the work unit’s goals, which are aligned with the section/division/bureau’s goals, which are aligned with the agency’s goals.
  - o With employees’ input, leaders describe and measure specific behaviors that are consistent with the vision.

- All employees recognize and reward desirable behaviors.
  - Supervisors and managers are held accountable for communicating the message and reinforcing the desired behaviors.
  - Leaders keep the focus on outcomes rather than on tasks or activities.
6. Supervisors and managers at all levels publicly acknowledge and recognize behaviors that demonstrate support of the vision.

Imagine that you go to work three years from now, after you have made a commitment to ensure that every employee sees how he or she contributes to the success of public safety in your community. Envision the positive differences in the stations and offices, and in the community. Remember that all it takes to begin this transformation is asking a simple question: "What's your job?" →

Pat Lynch, Ph.D., is President of Business Alignment Strategies, Inc., a consulting firm that helps first responders maximize their performance by removing or mitigating obstacles that prevent them from achieving their mission.

