

Smart guide

# Take the complication out of competencies

5 ways to help employees understand what's expected





# The challenge

Employees want clear guidance about how to be successful. Job descriptions define what an employee should do, but don't describe *how* to do it.

So Human Resources often develops “competencies”: the knowledge, behaviors and skills that define success for a particular job. (Some companies use other terms to refer to competencies, including “attributes” and “capabilities.”)

The problem is that competencies are often complicated. They're usually expressed as an interlocking set of attributes that vary from job to job and from level to level. The terms may seem abstract or may be expressed in HR language employees are not familiar with.

As a result, employees may not readily understand how competencies work—how they align to a job description, for example, and how they relate to performance management. Competencies may, in fact, have the unintended consequence of resulting in less clarity, instead of more focus.

**How can you communicate competencies in a way that makes sense to employees?** We'd like to show you how to make competencies meaningful and easy to put into action using five simple techniques. We'll use an example based on a company that has these competencies: focus on growth, teamwork, innovation and personal responsibility. Ready to get started? Let's go.



## 5 ways to help employees understand what's expected

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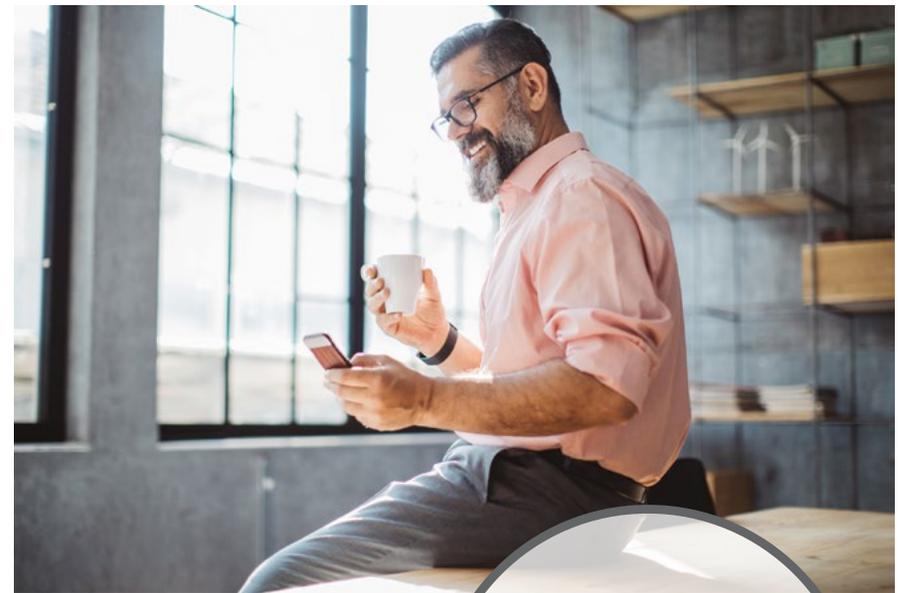
# 1

## Keep it simple

If employees are expected to demonstrate certain competencies in their work, they need to understand what each represents. Start by summarizing each competency in one simple sentence or phrase, using plain language.

### The do's and don't's of defining competencies

Competency	Don't say this	Do say this
<b>Focus on growth</b>	Optimize synergies to ensure continued growth and success in the face of an evolving marketplace	Understand how the business environment is changing, and seek ways we can overcome those challenges to grow
<b>Teamwork</b>	Leverage relationships on every level to ensure that all colleagues are collectively contributing	Collaborate with others to address issues, solve problems and create new ideas
<b>Innovation</b>	Foster a strong culture of appreciation for the thoughts, values and ideas of fellow colleagues	Consider how a different approach to an issue can change the outcome
<b>Personal responsibility</b>	Demonstrate a strong passion and ownership for your area of the business that will inspire	"Own" your job, and manage it the way you would a business you are in charge of



Strive for an 8th grade reading level. You can check readability in Microsoft Word's "Spelling and Grammar" tool. Select "Options" > "Show readability statistics."

## 2 Connect the dots

Show how competencies relate to other key concepts within the company. Use an infographic to show how the competencies connect to such concepts as company strategy and values.



By understanding the bigger picture, employees will also recognize where and how their efforts make a difference.

# 3

## Show employees how to take action

Provide scenarios employees can relate to, with fictional characters to represent a particular role. This helps employees see themselves in the situation.

For example: let's assume that one of the company's objectives is to increase the number of services it sells to a single client by 40%.

To achieve this objective, employees need to demonstrate each of the company's four competencies in different ways, based on level. Show the specific steps a sales manager can take by creating a persona.

### Create a persona



Meet Emma. Emma is a sales manager, supporting key accounts. To be successful, she collaborates with business partners across the organization. To achieve our objective, here's what Emma needs to do.

Competency	Behavior	Action
<b>Focus on growth</b>	Anticipate customer needs	Schedule quarterly meetings with each client to understand challenges and future goals
<b>Teamwork</b>	Embrace cross-team collaboration	Build one key relationship in each business unit
<b>Innovation</b>	Value the ideas of others	Schedule cross-team brainstorming sessions to develop new customer approaches
<b>Personal responsibility</b>	Take ownership for results	Set a personal goal to contribute to three cross-service client wins



Scenarios reflect real situations so employees can see themselves in the example and know what's expected.

# 4

## Coach managers on how to talk with their team members

Employees rely on managers to interpret the big picture and convey “what it means to us”—what actions will drive the success of their department.

Help managers do that with a [toolkit](#) that gives them the information and resources they need to facilitate meaningful conversations with their team members.

### The elements of a toolkit

- ✓ **A message** from the CEO or CHRO
- ✓ **Details** on the importance of the manager’s communication role
- ✓ **Key content** (an elevator speech and talking points)
- ✓ **One-page overview** of the competencies
- ✓ **Frequently asked questions**
- ✓ **A discussion guide**—including scenarios like the one on page 5—for team meetings and individual conversations.



To be sure managers take action, conduct a briefing session (in-person or virtually) to review the elements of the toolkit.

# 5 Keep up the momentum

Introducing competencies is just the first step. To make them real for employees, it's important to provide ongoing reinforcement for how to demonstrate the competencies at each level of the organization.

## Five ideas to keep the conversation going

- 1 Create a guide** that illustrates the behaviors employees need to demonstrate for each competency. If the behaviors vary by level, include that information so employees know what's expected throughout the organization.
- 2 Show how the competencies connect to performance**—the combination of *what* employees do (measured through the goals they set) and *how* they deliver on them (measured through the competencies).
- 3 Encourage storytelling** throughout the organization that describes how employees have successfully put specific behaviors into practice. Share these examples as a regular feature on your intranet.
- 4 Recognize achievements** during town hall meetings. Include photos and employee quotes that bring a particular competency to life.
- 5 Help employees focus on the most important behaviors** to achieve the organization's objectives. For example, a team brainstorming session is an interactive way for work teams to identify actions they can take on a local level to support those behaviors.



Keep these tactics in mind as you build your communication plan (both enterprise-wide and at the local level) to give employees clarity around how they can be successful.

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- Develop a key message platform
- Craft compelling content to grab employees' attention
- Support managers with resources to succeed in their role as communicators

## 5 things to know about us



**Global.** We've created communication programs that reach employees across the world, in nearly every continent (but not, we admit, Antarctica).



**Experienced.** We have decades of experience in communicating change, initiatives, HR programs and policies, and many other topics.



**Collaborative.** Our favorite way of working is to meet with our clients and put our heads together.



**Client-focused.** Our mission is to help you solve your problems. To set you up for success. To make sure you get the recognition you deserve. (We think you get the picture.)



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