

WORKPLACE MENTOR CASE STUDY

**Darwin Li, director of accounting and finance,
McDonald's Restaurants, Hong Kong**



Setting performance objectives requires first outlining the organisation's overall objectives for the coming year – and explaining how the finance department's work will support activities to meet those objectives. Cascading personal objectives down to each team member gives people the opportunity to think about their own individual tactics, before sitting down with their manager to map out measurable goals and put together a plan and timeline. Once these have been agreed, it is the responsibility of the employee to take ownership of their own objectives. That includes taking the initiative to discuss any problems or delays that may arise.

Everyone should know which skills they will need to learn. As an employer, we recognise that it is important for our people to develop as professional accountants and for them to demonstrate good technical, managerial and communication skills. We structure our work so that people can be moved around in job rotations and have as many opportunities to grow as possible. Even if they do not have specific responsibility for performing certain tasks, it is useful for them to at least understand how those tasks fit into the department. They do this through shadowing and observing, especially if they are new employees or if they are going to be supervising the people performing those tasks.

Every organisation needs its people to be effective. For us, we want to develop our finance professionals so that they can take on increasing responsibility and co-ordinate the work of junior colleagues. You need to have a culture where people are enthusiastic about learning new skills and eager to take on more complex work. And having highly skilled and motivated, qualified accountants who can step in and look after specific parts of the finance function also extends our capacity to give employees extended leave or sabbaticals.

The appraisal is a key component of individual development, but I do not regard this as something that only happens once or twice a year. At the end of each project, I might have more informal talks with people about their performance. These are important discussions as they pave the way for a more constructive

formal appraisal at the end of the year, with no surprises for either party.

Of course, sometimes you have to give negative feedback but this should be handled sensitively. Sometimes, it is better to give the employee hints so that he or she can say how a task could have been performed differently. However, there are also occasions when you cannot risk a more significant mistake happening and you must take corrective action more quickly. But the purpose of giving such feedback is for the employee to emerge better equipped to do that aspect of his or her job – instead of feeling unmotivated or feeling let down.

Rewarding good performance is critical. People respond well to being given praise in a large group, or in front of the 'big bosses'. It makes them want to continue to improve and it gives others an incentive to do well too. But you can also present awards or encourage managers to take their teams out for lunch or dinner if a particular project has been completed well or by a difficult deadline.

Taking an active interest in the development of your finance professionals is beneficial for managers and their employers – and it is also important for succession planning. If managers can demonstrate they have developed finance employees who go on to qualify, it removes an obstacle to their own promotion – as senior executives will have greater confidence in the ability of those coming through the ranks to step into their shoes.



CASE STUDY