



Your CEO's
Next Email



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Most of our clients want to elevate performance in their organization. Yet many hesitate until they have the excuse of a restructuring or redesign to take the first step. We believe there's no bad time to start increasing performance and that the process starts with a note from the CEO.

That CEO note tells the organization that higher performance is needed, why and how the company will get there. It's purposeful, direct and clear. It should read like a conversation that one honest adult is having with another honest adult, not the corporate-speak that too often dominates notes from the top.

We've drafted multiple CEO notes on this topic and thought it would be helpful to share an example here. We share the note first and then break down the intent and value of each section.

From: CEO
To: All employees
Subject: Steps to elevate our performance

“We enter into 2023 as a company that has successfully served our clients, investors and employees for more than 50 years. You have each been a critical part of that success and shaped us into the company we are today. Thank you.

We now compete in a much different world than even a few years ago. Our clients are demanding more innovative and more affordable products. New competitors are adding capacity in our markets. Regulators are increasing their demands at a steep cost to our business.

We need to elevate our performance to continue fulfilling our company’s mission in this changed world. This performance improvement effort starts with me and the executive team and extends to every team member worldwide.

Starting this year, we will increase individual and company performance in three ways:

- 1. Increase goal challenge and coaching:** We have too often set goals that can be easily accomplished and not transparently coached team members to higher performance. Going forward, we will train all people managers to set more challenging goals and to actively coach for performance and behavior. We will measure how effectively they do this and include these metrics in their performance evaluations.
- 2. Increase team capability and depth:** Our capability needs are shifting and we need team members who can perform at a high level in these new challenges. We will hold people managers accountable to build their team’s capabilities in the areas that are most critical. We will adequately fund these development investments.
- 3. Better differentiate performance:** We have been overly generous in our evaluations of individual performance and behaviors, doing a disservice to both our team members and the company. Starting with our next performance cycle, we will accurately assess performance against the challenging goals that have been set. We will more sharply differentiate the consequences for higher and lower relative performance.

We recognize that not every team member may want to, or be able to, perform at these new standards. In those cases, we will act in a timely manner and treat team members with the consideration and respect that all our associates deserve.

You’ll be hearing more from your business or function leader about next steps in this initiative. Our organization has a history of rising to new challenges. By elevating our performance, we will rise to this one and emerge as an even stronger company. “

There is no wrong time to decide to elevate your organization's performance.

How this message is communicated is critical, however, since cringey CEO messages are their own category on social media. The note above is extremely intentional in content and phrasing and we break down below the purpose of each paragraph.

Paragraph 1: Honor the past. The opening honors the history of the organization and the people who have built it. It explicitly says, "thank you" and purposely ends the paragraph with those words. It is intended to be a clear dividing line between the company's past and what you're about to ask them to do.

Paragraph 2: A compelling case for change. This paragraph draws a contrast between the company's past performance and future challenges. It starts the pivot from what allowed them to succeed in the past to what's required for future success. It also supports Paragraph 4's statement that not everyone might succeed in the changed company by describing that future state.

Paragraph 3: Call to action. This introduces in direct terms the shared responsibility to increase performance, built on the change case in paragraph 2. This intentionally mentions the CEO and their team to reinforce that this is a collective responsibility, and not one balanced on the backs of a small segment of the workforce.

Paragraph 4: What will change and how. This very specifically states what will happen, by who and the consequences. Too many CEO communications have a corporate communications veneer on them that obfuscates specifically what is needed.



Paragraph 5: The consequences. This critical paragraph is missing from most CEO communications on elevating performance. It explicitly states that some current employees will not meet the new performance standards and will be let go from the organization because of it. Employees know this will be the case so CEO transparency at this point, without excessive detail, adds an appropriate level of seriousness and honesty to the close.

We've written in detail on the action steps recommend in Steps 1 – 3 so we won't provide additional content here. A selection of our [articles on goal setting, development and performance](#) can each be a helpful guide as you're planning to how implement these changes.

There's no wrong time to challenge your company to elevate performance. We know of no organization that is performing at its potential, and its weaknesses are typically found in the three areas listed above. A confident CEO should recognize this and make a statement, soon, in the clear and purposeful language we suggest above.

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