

# “CREATING CLIENT CONNECTION”

## PART 2

BY ELENA GALBRAITH

### POTENTIAL -> PERFORMANCE -> RESULTS

In the September issue of the Exemplar, I began a miniseries called “Creating Client Connection” where I hopefully painted a picture of the importance of visual communication as a way to connect with others. Part 2 is a continuation of the series. I encourage those of you who have not had a chance to peruse the first article to do so before launching into this installment.

### What words mean matters

We have all heard the words potential, performance, activity, accomplishment and results used in business conversations. And I’m sure we all have our own working definition of what these terms mean. In this article, I attempt to bring clarity to these terms as I define them from Webster’s point of view, my articulation in business terms and, later in this article, through a visual—a model that puts these concepts together into visible language in a way that resonates with management (C-level and below), individual contributors and the Human Resources function.

#### **Webster’s definition**

- *Potential*: existing in possibility; capable of development into actuality.
- *Performance*: the execution of an action; something accomplished.
- *Activity*: a similar process actually or potentially involving mental function; an organizational unit for performing a specific function; also: its function or duties.
- *Accomplishment*: something that has been accomplished; achievement.
- *Results*: to proceed or arise as a consequence, effect or conclusion.

#### **My articulation:**

- *Potential*: I’ll use Webster’s definition.
- *Performance*: successful job performance; meaning the accomplishments a person produces that add value to the business (e.g., enterprise, organization, business unit).
- *Activity*: what people do; the actions they perform; tasks; behaviors.
- *Accomplishment*: the outputs of value produced by a person that align to desired organization goals, tangible or intangible; stated as a noun—person, place or thing (e.g., a competent student, a safe community, a widget).
- *Results*: The measurable outcomes to the business that result when people in the business successfully produce accomplishments.

### No guessing!

Whenever you hear a word that can be interpreted more than one way, ask “How are you defining ‘X’ in the context of this conversation?” Take a risk, put yourself out there and just ask the person you are speaking with. The worst thing that can happen is that you facilitate bringing clarity into the conversation and, maybe, even gain a reputation as I have—a person who brings clarity and context to the conversation.

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In the audio version of the training course “Helping Clients Succeed,” Mahan Khalsa tells about a woman who engages an attorney about a divorce. The attorney asks the lady several questions to understand the situation. He asks, “Do you have grounds?” She replies, “Why yes I do, about two acres.” He asks, “Do you have a grudge?” And she replies, “No, we have a carport.” After a few more volleys, the attorney finally asks, “Ma’am, are you sure you want a divorce?” and she replies firmly, “No, I don’t want one at all but my husband does. He claims we have difficulty communicating.”

Not being clear and clearly understood can be a nail in the coffin of a marriage or the death of a business relationship—the consequences cannot be understated. As Mahan would say, “Let’s get real!”

## The “pain” of it all

Clients, shareholders and stakeholders want business results. Knowing this is the easy part. How to go about getting those results is often what our clients ask us to assist them with. It’s often hard to see the forest for the trees. You might think that you know the pathway out because you have taken it before or another one like it before, but the path does not always lead you to success.

As I referenced in part 1 of this miniseries, clients face business challenges everyday that need solutions—low employee productivity, excessive cycle times, eroding quality, declining customer satisfaction and unhealthy attrition—to name a few. Even though the request from clients is for help, the request usually comes in the form of a solution; things like, we need to improve the process or train our people. The expectation by clients is that the consultant will “fix” what is broken and get to the root cause. While conducting a root cause analysis might be one way to solve the problem, I believe that there is a much better way to approach the situation. Instead of fixing what is broken, let’s replicate what’s working well by defining exemplary performance.

## Another way to look at things

I am currently working with a client who wants to assess the performance of a given job role because the organization believes there is a huge gap in skills impacting business results. One approach would be to find out who is underperforming and why—then the client does what it often does, “fix them” or “fire them.” Conducting a root cause analysis is something Exemplary Performance can do, but it is not our preferred approach in helping clients improve bottom-line results.

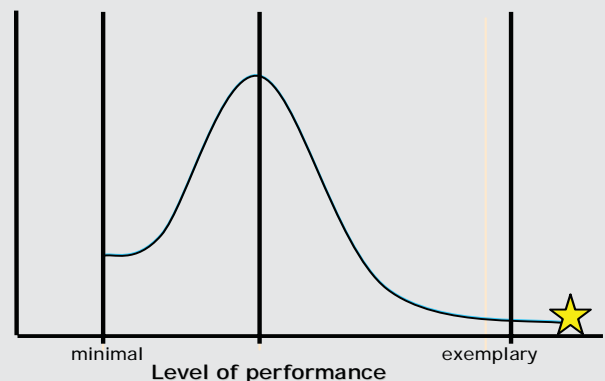
The traditional bell curve is a common way for businesses to represent the distribution of talent in the organization. Some of the people are performing at minimal level, a majority at midline and a few perform at high levels.

Exemplary Performance, LLC, agrees with the workforce distribution, as stated above, but we have re-named the horizontal axes of the bell curve to be “Level of performance” as defined by “accomplished” performance (as opposed to activity).

Exemplary Performance, LLC, seeks to:

Work with client organizations to attain optimum organizational effectiveness by enabling exemplary human performance.

I often use the bell curve graphic on the right as a starting point in discussions with clients. This is a model that everyone understands and the terms defined earlier are easily woven into the telling of the story using the client’s situation.



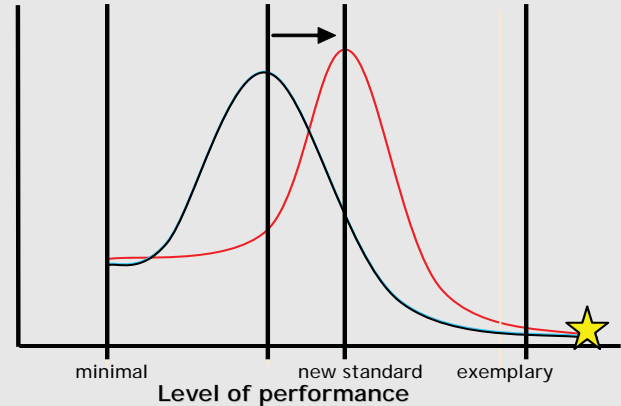
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## Potential is NOT performance

Let's return to the story of the client above wanting to close the skills gap of his people. The potential to improve the performance for this client begins with defining exemplary performance. We should not confuse the definition of performance as actual performance. As a result of our discussion, the client realized that he needed to define star performance first in order to assess the target audience. (In Step 1 of the process, the desired business outcomes for the project and the potential to improve performance are defined through business analysis).

Performer analysis is Step 2. Interviews with the "best of the best" in role are conducted and a Profile of Exemplary Performance (PEP) is created.

During the interview process, in addition to identifying the accomplishments produced by the performer (in most jobs there are usually between four and eight accomplishments) and the activities or tasks they perform, the analyst also captures information about the performance support system—influences that need to be in place to enable successful job execution and improved business results.



With the PEP captured and an enabling performance system defined, the organization is now positioned to move the bell curve to the right and capture the green space.

In the second build of the bell curve, the green shaded area (above) represents the "potential" gain to the organization and a defined "new standard" of performance. Defining the PEP does not produce improved business results in and of itself unless the organization takes action to move the curve. The PEP can be used immediately as the basis for creating hiring guidance, coaching guides, job descriptions and other management tools; however, even with these tools in the hands of management and Human Resources, there might be other inhibitors to performance that the organization will need to mitigate or remove before seeing the positive change that leads to improved business results.

## Capturing the green space—Performance improvement!

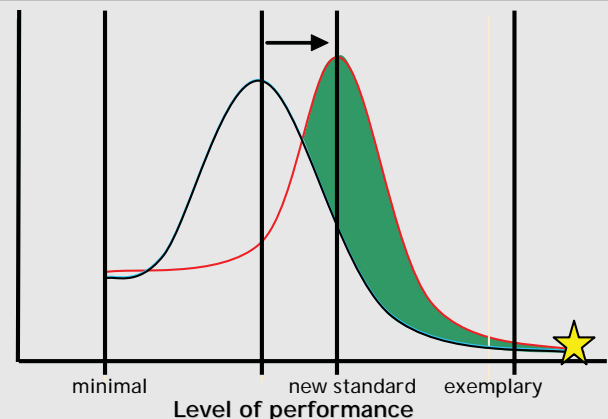
The last step in the process is capturing the green space. Back to the story of the client, which is to date unfolding. Once step 2 (Performer Analysis) is complete, the client knows what exemplary performance is and how to get it. From the analysis done to date, it appears that the client has some organizational and process issues that need to be addressed. In addition, we will be assessing the competence of the target audience using the PEP as the baseline.

The third and final build of the visual shows the organization capturing the green space.

Even though no two projects are ever the same, we can say the following with full assurance:

For organizations to capture the green space and realize desired business results, business management needs to:

- Select high potential performers
- Train them to produce accomplishments
- Reengineer the work environment
- Motivate their people



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Of course, this is easier said than done, oftentimes, clients want support in both defining and describing the potential opportunity and then developing and implementing a solution set that exactly meets their business needs.

To bring this article back full circle, helping our clients succeed requires that we effectively create client connections. The adaptation of the traditional bell curve has helped our clients see the approach that Exemplary Performance, LLC, takes to help them attain optimum organizational effectiveness by enabling exemplary human performance.

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Elena Galbraith, CPT, is Vice President, Performance Improvement for Exemplary Performance, LLC. Elena heads up EP's Western Region Office in Redmond, Washington. She has been a practitioner in the field of human performance improvement since the early 1990s. This is a continuation of Elena's second article written for The Exemplar, and she looks forward to contributing more to our newsletter in order to fulfill her passion of evangelizing human performance improvement as a core business strategy!



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## EP brings on new employees with continued growth!

### Jennifer C. Wolf

#### *Business Operations Coordinator*

Effective October 26, 2006, Jennifer C. Wolf joined Exemplary Performance team at the Headquarters office in Annapolis, Maryland as Business Operations Coordinator. Jennifer earned a Bachelor's degree in Economics in 2004 from the University of Maryland and comes to us with two years experience gained as an office manager for a real estate investment group in Washington DC.

Jennifer will be assisting with EP's financial management. She will also be maintaining the Annapolis office and supporting with other various projects.

On a personal note, Jennifer was married in August of this year and has been enjoying her first months of marriage to her husband, Brian. Jennifer loves to travel and enjoyed spending a week snorkeling and exploring the beautiful island of Bermuda on their honeymoon.

### Marie Mills

#### *Consulting Intern*

Effective November 1, 2006, Marie Mills joined Exemplary Performance as a consulting intern at the Western Region office in Redmond, Washington. She brings five years of consulting experience and ten years geographic information systems expertise. Her systems approach to information management has led her to improve the way data was stored, tracked, shared, documented, and disseminated at many different organizations over the years resulting in significant cost savings.

On a personal note, Marie was born and raised in Seattle and balances her love of mountaineering, telemark skiing, kayaking, and trips to the arctic wilderness, with a passion for cooking and eating. She also supports her community through volunteer work.

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