

ACE: Action-Center-Energy

Effective employee health check for leaders and companies

If you are in a leadership role and wondering how to effectively evaluate the employees on your team or in your department, you're not alone. Especially if this responsibility is new to you, it can quickly become overwhelming to meet the diverse expectations of employees and stakeholders such as HR or senior management. If this sounds familiar, keep reading.

Who is more important than what.

I have been working in management positions for over 25 years and have initiated and led many change and optimization processes. Throughout this time, it has become clear that people are ultimately more crucial to success than ideas: even a great idea that is poorly implemented usually leads to miserable results. On the other hand, a mediocre idea that is implemented excellently often produces a good or at least usable result. Execution is therefore more important for success than the idea itself.

Successful execution requires the "right" people. Thus, effective and practical employee assessment became a focus of my management activities early on: How can you arrive at a quick and meaningful, comprehensive assessment without getting bogged down in details and confusing yourself? And how can you ensure consistent evaluations for employees across different departments and hierarchical levels?

To this end, I have developed a simple yet meaningful assessment method based on three principles: ACE - Action, Center, Energy.

ACTION

Actions speak louder than words.

Judging someone primarily by their actions is the most impartial approach a leader can take. It also provides the opportunity to respond to what is said in a more neutral way in many ways, because in the end, it is the results that count. The prerequisite is being able to assess actions to a sufficient degree. This can be a challenge, especially in digital or remote environments, but in my experience it is always feasible. The employee's own information and feedback from colleagues are also taken into account for the assessment.

When planning performance reviews, you should make sure to regularly take into account an employee's actions and work results throughout the year, as well as their actual work effort. Make sure you do not consider intentions or plans, but

only concrete output. What matters here is not just the quantity, but the ability to create impact. Also, involve stakeholders to gather external feedback on these points. Advise your employee to do the same to incorporate all different perspectives. When evaluating another manager, you must also be well-acquainted with the actions of their employees to fully understand the results associated with their leadership. When conducting the evaluation, make sure that in the “Action” assessment you address only these facts and observations and seek common ground regarding what did - and did not - happen. Establishing clear expectations in advance further contributes to a successful and mutually agreed-upon evaluation.

It may appear ironic that Arnold relies on “Action” as the most important principle. In the end, however, it is always the concrete output that makes the relevant difference, and this only results from action. The goal is to lead employees away from “one should” and “I think” to “I do” – this is ultimately what company success is based on.

“Nothing good happens unless you do it.”

Erich Kästner, Epigrams

CENTER

Strength comes from the center.

The essence of a company lies at its center. This is not primarily about the physical aspect although, in my experience, physical presence makes a very positive contribution. It's mainly about the metaphysical aspect: actively participating in a company's purpose, experiencing success and failure firsthand, and exchanging ideas with like-minded people while pursuing a common goal. All of this contributes to employees finding their work meaningful and companies continuing to thrive. Employees should enter the playing field and not watch from the sidelines, make declarations of intent, or shout advice. It is therefore important to assess the position of employees in relation to the center of the company or their tendency to move toward it. This is not an exact science, but it can nevertheless be evaluated surprisingly well. Here, too, it is important to consider the employee's self-assessment and their working peers' opinions and to include these in the evaluation.

When thinking about the performance review, you can ask yourself questions like the following to understand how much the employee is centered at the company: How well does he or she know the company and its goals in detail? How well is he or she integrated into the company, and how strong is his or her sense of belonging? To what extent does he or she actively contribute with opinions and initiative, even outside their area of responsibility? To what extent does he or she care about the well-being of the company and their colleagues? To what extent could you expect him or her to remain committed even when

things get really tough? The employee should do the same for self-assessment, and stakeholders should be surveyed again to get a complete picture.

Working at the center is the second important principle. What has an impact and lasts are people and stories. The latter are only written in the middle of the arena. The goal is to lead employees to greater visibility and effectiveness which has an important impact on “Action.”

“Right in the middle, not just there.”

DSF/Sport1, advertising slogan

ENERGY

Energy triggers chain reactions.

At first glance, this may seem somewhat esoteric. Employees should tend to contribute more energy to the system than they take away from it. It is important to note that it is about tendency, not about a snapshot. Everyone has phases where they “suck” energy. These should not be overrated, but rather viewed from a medium-term perspective. An overall positive individual energy balance is a prerequisite for the system as a whole to benefit and ultimately provide every employee with an environment of positive tension. Energy cannot be assessed consistently on the basis of clear metrics, but its tendency can be easily assessed with the help of feedback from working peers.

For the sample performance review, the following questions can help put the topic into perspective: How do I feel when interacting with him or her? How do they make others feel in his or her presence? How does he or she handle negative or positive energy from others? To what extent does he or she have control over their energy without losing their authenticity? Is he or she a giver or a taker of energy?

Be sure to review and track the topic several times a year, and learn to keep your energy radar constantly alert to detect persistent negative vibes and intervene immediately if strong negative patterns arise.

The positive energy contribution is the third important principle. The risk of a negative energy contribution is often underestimated, especially when the “Action” is right. Ultimately, however, energy drain causes more damage because it infiltrates the entire system and distracts everyone from the essentials due to the resulting unrest. Remember that a team with good chemistry can achieve more than a group of lone wolves, even if they’re action heroes. The goal is to guide employees toward supplying energy to the system which has a positive impact on them and the entire organization.

“Where focus goes, energy flows.”

Tim Robbins

I have applied the ACE method many times in practice. It is both effective and easy to communicate and understand. Of course, there are sometimes differences in the assessments made by managers and employees themselves, especially with regard to the two principles “Center” and “Energy,” as these, unlike “Action,” cannot be substantiated by hard facts. Misunderstandings can be easily avoided by agreeing on specific expectations regarding behavior in advance. However, another approach is to expect employees to take personal responsibility and initiative. In the army, there is a guidance for this: offer your services to the commander instead of waiting for further instructions.

Due to its simplicity, the ACE method also works between employees, making it well suited for this type of feedback once its principles have been understood.

For a concrete, comprehensible assessment, a combination of a verbal explanation and a rating scale has proven effective, e.g., a numerical scale, a grading system, a percentage system, or a bipolar scale. The last method has the advantage of clearly showing the “neutral” midpoint, which actually represents the regular standard for each principle, i.e., what is expected for a role in any case. If a principle receives a negative rating, there is an immediate need for appropriate management intervention. There are various ways to do this, which will not be outlined in detail here. If two or more principles are negative, the collaboration should be terminated from a professional standpoint.

The ACE method is an effective anti-aging treatment for companies: it keeps them fresh and protects them from free radicals. The prerequisite for this is – in the spirit of “Action” – not to leave it at theoretical consideration, but to apply the method decisively.

*“One may know how to conquer without being able to do it.”
Sunzi, The Art of War*

Arnold Blüml, April 2026
Success follows execution.