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Workforce Performance Management Program**

Preparing for and Conducting Effective Performance Appraisal Discussions

The purpose of the official performance appraisal discussion is to let the employee know where he or she stands and to issue a rating based on performance over the entire appraisal period. The final appraisal becomes an official record or the “rating of record” used in making a variety of personnel decisions. To achieve maximum benefit from the discussion you should:

- ***Prepare for your meeting.*** Do not “wing it.” Being prepared communicates that the employee’s performance was important to the success of the unit. Collect and review documentation of performance and accomplishments made throughout the appraisal period.
- ***Know what you want to say before the meeting begins.*** Think through the issues you want to discuss. Have examples of work performance to back up your appraisal. Be prepared to talk about how your performance review resulted in the specific rating(s) you gave each major area of responsibility in the performance plan.
- ***Begin and end with a statement of purpose.*** By previewing what is to be discussed, you give the employee a chance to get on the same wavelength before you get to the heart of your message. By summarizing briefly what was discussed, you reinforce the major points you want the employee to remember.
- ***Explain your rating on each major area of responsibility.*** Use qualitative and quantitative data and actual examples to illustrate how you reached your decision as to the rating on each Area.
- ***Praise good performance.*** Discuss accomplishments as well as areas in which the employee could improve. Noticing and appreciating what employees have accomplished motivates employees to achieve or maintain higher levels of performance. Many managers don’t give their employees as much feedback as the employee would like. Pointing out to employees the specific things they are doing well keeps them interested and involved.
- ***If there is a problem, do not gloss over it.*** Throughout the appraisal period, document any problems and address performance and conduct issues as they occur or develop. The employee must be given an opportunity to improve. If he or she does not know about a problem, he or she will probably continue to fail to meet expectations. The appraisal discussion should summarize areas in which the employee has improved over time and areas in need of improvement going forward. The manager and employee should develop and implement a plan for helping the employee meet the standards.

- ***Avoid emotionally charged language.*** Criticize the behavior rather than the person. Instead of saying, “You’re too fussy” say, “I expect you to provide a well-proofed document, but not at the expense of timeliness. Give me something to react to and we’ll fine-tune it together.” Absolute statements or exaggerations should be avoided as well. e.g., “You always take an extra ten minutes for lunch” or “You always blame your mistakes on everyone else.” Also avoid questions that put the employee on the defensive. e.g., “Do you really think you can get his cooperation by acting like that?”
- ***Keep the discussion professional and objective.*** Avoid being drawn into arguments. If things get off track, use active listening skills to get to the point of the matter.
- ***Be prepared to stop talking and start listening.*** When you see an employee’s level of receptivity drop (employee looks confused, starts to argue, looks away, shakes his or her head back and forth, folds his or her arms firmly and sits back) stop talking and ask the employee to talk about concerns or perspectives on his or her performance or the assessment that has been provided.
- ***Pay attention to pacing and timing.*** Pause after making your main points. Vary your speaking style. Do not interrupt the other person when you want to talk.
- ***Try to establish as much agreement as you can between you and your employee.*** The more you agree on performance the more receptive he or she is going to be to suggestions for improvement. Emphasize areas of agreement.
- ***Get employee reaction to your assessment after you’ve presented it.*** As you present your assessment carefully monitor employee reactions. Ask for reactions after you’ve given your verbal assessment. This allows employees to think out loud and digest what you said, express any strong feelings they may have held back, and gives you an opportunity to ensure your message was received.