

# Performance Appraisal Guide

To be of most value a performance appraisal must be properly administered. In order to ensure an effective appraisal program, each supervisor and department head must understand the importance of the appraisal and the nature of the appraisal process.

## **Purpose of Performance Appraisal**

The College will best be able to accomplish its objectives and each individual will be most effective when its employees:

- know what is expected;
- know how they are doing;
- obtain assistance and guidance as needed.

Both day-to-day and periodic discussions are essential in the development of mutual understanding and agreement between the employee and supervisor with regard to job duties and projects. Timely discussions related to specific situations are generally more effective than just discussing them at an annual performance appraisal. However, formal documentation of performance on a regular basis does provide information of benefit for the employee, the supervisor, and the College.

In addition, performance appraisals are necessary for the implementation of an effective merit pay program. An appraisal plays a role in motivating employees through discussion of specific accomplishments or problems and in determining salary increase amount. Among the various functions of an appraisal are the following:

Measures both individual performance and contribution to departmental performance.

Identifies performance areas where improvement is needed.

Establishes goals and/or objectives to be achieved during the coming review period.

Creates documentation necessary to support decisions in areas relating to pay, promotion, training or termination.

## **Preparation of Appraisal Forms**

Performance is best evaluated in comparison to the job description or previously established goals/objectives. A supervisor may request from the Human Resources Office previous performance appraisal in order to recognize achievement or use as a vehicle for coaching where problems have developed.

When preparing a performance appraisal, it is important to be candid, realistic and fair. Keep in mind that your purpose is to compare the employee's performance against the essential work requirements. Personal bias should not become a factor in the appraisal process. Your written appraisal comments should be consistent with your oral statements.

These questions may be helpful as you evaluate and comment on an employee's performance.

To what extent does the employee demonstrate a sense of priorities and adaptability to a change in goals or objectives?

Has the employee cultivated good work habits and organizational skills and gained an understanding of the overall needs of the position and of specific projects at hand?

To what extent does the employee demonstrate the skills required to identify, analyze, and solve problems? How effective is the employee at following through and resolving the problem?

In the performance of tasks that require cooperation and communication with others in and out of your office, how well does the employee work with others? General correspondence, reports, presentations, or other areas as required by the position should be considered.

If supervision is an aspect of the position, to what extent does the employee provide effective leadership or help other employees to develop and become more effective at work?

To what extent does the employee demonstrate initiative in improving the effectiveness of his or her position? Consideration should be given to suggestions which may have been provided by the employee to streamline systems or procedures, or ways in which the position could have expanded to meet the needs of the department or College.

One good technique for arriving at a balanced view of the employee's performance over time is to keep notes throughout the appraisal period. This enables the supervisor to look at performance in a variety of work situations and minimize the impact of isolated incidents or unique circumstances. A blank appraisal form can be used throughout the year or individual notes in a file.

It is important to recognize and avoid errors commonly made when completing a performance appraisal which would reduce the value of the appraisal. Some of the more common pitfalls are:

Halo Effect: Allowing the evaluation of one factor to influence the evaluation of another. The supervisor may tend to view all factors the same as one earlier factor because of a favorable impression of performance in that one factor.

Severity Tendency: Being overly critical of performance because unrealistic or unachievable performance standards have been established.

Leniency Tendency: Tendency to be overly generous or unjustly tolerant, and view performance high on all factors, even though not all performance has been.

Central Tendency: Evaluating all performance as average because of a fear of being candid.

Force of Recent Errors: Focusing only on employee's recent, dramatic events, or on what is most easily remembered, rather than on typical behavior over the entire appraisal period.

Personal Bias: Allowing personal opinions unrelated to job performance to affect the evaluation.

Making any of these common errors will result in an unfair appraisal. Often the effect will be the opposite of what a supervisor had hoped. An incorrect or dishonest appraisal will mislead and confuse employees, and may serve to destroy individual incentive.

### **Conducting the Appraisal Interview**

The following outline is provided in an attempt to make the interview easier for the supervisor and of more value to the employee. At the end of the interview, regardless of whether there is agreement, it is important that each individual understand the other's opinions and thoughts. In this way, the supervisor and employee can work toward building a stronger relationship.

#### Preparation for the Interview:

Schedule an appointment that allows sufficient time, when neither individual is under great pressure. Give the employee advance notice of the appointment. Schedule only a couple Performance Appraisals per day. They take a lot of energy for the supervisor and you want to be able to give them your full attention.

Provide for privacy; permit no interruptions.

Delay the interview if you are angry or upset, as a positive frame of mind is important.

Review any pertinent background information, including job descriptions, project or status reports, prior year's goals and any notes you have made during the appraisal period.

Have clearly in mind the performance criteria – what went well and what didn't go as well, the factual reasons for giving specific criticism or praise, and whether improvement in any area is needed or is possible. Discuss training/development areas.

Consider the employee's point of view and try to anticipate reactions to the discussion.

#### Discussion of the Appraisal:

Compliment the employee whenever appropriate without going to extremes. Failure to recognize good performance destroys motivation, while too much praise raises questions about sincerity and supervisory ability.

Stay focused, remain good eye contact and stay on track.

Make criticism constructive. If pointing out a weakness, offer a means for correction or ask the employee for suggestions for improvement.

Cite specific examples of performance; avoid generalities.

Ask questions, listen carefully and do not interrupt.

Keep the appraisal job centered; avoid discussion on personal issues not related to the job. Discussion of the employee's personality should only be addressed if it has had an adverse effect on departmental operations or the individual's performance.

Maintain objectivity. Do not show anger or hostility. Listen if the employee expresses anger. Do not expect to convince or persuade the individual while angry. If employee becomes angry and is no longer listening, reschedule for another time if necessary, allowing them to regroup.

Allow the individual to maintain self-respect. Do not try to prove the employee is wrong, or be sarcastic, overbearing or stern.

Develop a specific plan for any improvement desired or any follow-up activity and obtain the individual's agreement and commitment. Include a timeline for follow up. End on a positive note when summarizing the session.

The employees must also be given the opportunity to review the appraisal, make comments, and sign the form and be given a copy. Signatures are required, if employee refuses to sign, notate that on the signature line. The employee's signature indicates that the employee has had an opportunity to read and discuss the content of the appraisal. It does not necessarily imply agreement with the review.

### **After the appraisal:**

#### **Provide a copy to Human Resources for the employees file.**

After the appraisal interview has concluded, ask yourself the questions shown below. If each can be answered yes, you have conducted a successful appraisal interview. Remember that the interview is part of an ongoing communication process between you and your employees.

Does the employee clearly understand his/her role in regard to the job?

Does the employee clearly understand the reasons for the performance improvement?

Is the employee motivated and have a plan to move forward with improvement?

Does the employee know what will happen if there is no improvement? Follow up discussed?

Did the interview result in a stronger, positive working relationship with the employee?

Does the employee feel re-energized and excited about their job?

Are you as the supervisor excited about this employee's future in the job?

## Managing Tips When Conflict Arises

### **Recognizing and Managing Interpersonal Conflict**

When supervisors are willing to face the uncomfortable episode, the difficult moment, or the disgruntled employee, supervisors allow change to happen and growth to occur. The supervisor's challenge, then, is to learn how to successfully manage conflict so that it remains a positive force within his or her department.

Countless opportunities arise in almost any conversation for conflict to occur. The key is that these conflicts need to be managed in this context by the supervisor. The first step is to recognize the type of conflict. In general, we can point to four basic types of interpersonal conflict:

**Simple Conflict** is a disagreement in which two parties have varying opinions about a given topic. They often agree on the facts, but differ in their interpretation.

**Surface Conflict** is a misunderstanding which results from unclear or incomplete communication on the part of the message sender to the message receiver.

**Ego Conflict** is an emotional conflict in which the parties depart from the facts of the discussion and begin to involve personalities. Ego conflict is more difficult to manage than simple or surface conflict because it is emotional in nature and involves each person's values, ideals, and often their feelings of self-worth.

**Unstated Conflict**, demonstrated by non-verbal cues of resistance rather than by language.

Although no single technique in resolving conflict is the best in every situation, most managers will find the following techniques useful for each conflict type:

- **Simple Conflict** – Agree to disagree. “This is how I see it; how do you see it?”
- **Surface Conflict** – Clarify the points in dispute. “This is what I’m saying; is this what you’re hearing?” With clarification, both parties frequently discover that there really is not any conflict.
- **Ego Conflict** – Refocus on the problem, not the person.
- **Unstated Conflict** – Bring the point of dispute to the surface by making statements which acknowledge the existence of the problem. Then probe for ways of solving it together.

By identifying the conflict, managers will better understand the reasons behind the friction. Managing conflict effectively allows managers to change potentially negative situations into positive opportunities for change and growth.

Other techniques are useful for managing conflict in general:

1. *Address the conflict as soon as you see it.* Your clues might be something the employee says, an abrupt change in the expression on his or her face, or a number of body language indicators. When you see signs of emerging conflict, immediately suspend the conversation in order to discuss the conflict. When the conflict is resolved, both parties become emotionally

and mentally free once again to discuss the performance issue at hand. Remember: when signs of conflict are ignored and avoided, situations only tend to get worse.

2. *Include positive performance aspects in your discussion of the negatives when possible.* Search for the common ground – areas upon which you can both agree in order to build a solid foundation of teamwork. Remember that your positive reinforcement must be sincere and must not be followed by a “but” or “however,” which will effectively erase the positive from the employee’s memory.
3. *Ask for your employee’s input when searching for reasons for a particular behavior or solutions to a problem.* Don’t assume that you have all the answers. The employee often knows more about the facts of a situation than you do, and therefore has valuable information to add. Ask plenty of questions, which prompt the employee to assess situations and find solutions.
4. *Encourage employee problem-solving.* Empower each staff member to design and implement solutions to their own problems. Show by your actions that you respect your employees’ knowledge and good judgment. Through this approach, employees will become more self-sufficient and better equipped to manage difficult situations themselves. And employees are frequently more willing to follow their own advice than yours, so provide the freedom for employees to find their own solutions.

Remember...

- (1) conflict is inevitable;
- (2) conflict is an opportunity to clarify or take other action; and
- (3) conflict is complex, but not impossible to manage.