



Strengthening The Performance Appraisal Process

One of the most important tasks that managers and supervisors are required to complete is employee evaluation. For far too many managers and supervisors, the task is bothersome or, at best, rendered as a simple company requirement. Employees rarely view the experience as a growth opportunity and often feel like it is unfair to summarize a year's worth of work behavior into a short one-on-one discussion.

In fact, to conduct an effective employee appraisal that results in strong adjustments in employee performance is a much more comprehensive process. In addition to the completion of a performance appraisal document, the employee evaluation should generate a comprehensive discussion between the employee and the supervisor, focused on the overall contribution to department and company goals, as well as identifying both the employee's specific positive performance against those company and department goals as well as identifying specific areas of improvement. In fact, some companies have focused their entire performance appraisal form on goal attainment. Far too often, companies miss an important opportunity to help employees focus on their contribution to the company. An effective performance appraisal system is one of the strongest ways to improve supervisor-employee relationships and improve the communication between them.

Consider these steps to maximize the value of the appraisal process. They represent a proven process to ensure an organization's evaluation process is more effective.

Step One: Frequent Conversations

Once it is established that there is a company-wide assumption that all employees are constantly

getting better at their jobs, then frequent conversations with the supervisor, designed to maximize their employees' performance, are the foundations of the appraisal process. The goal here is not "finding what they're doing wrong" but, rather, focused more on a partnership with the goal of positive improvement. These conversations should be two-way dialogues and happen regularly. The bottom line in these discussions is the employee's awareness of his/her contribution to the company.

Step Two: Employee Self-Evaluations

Employees should be an important voice in their own evaluation. If the company uses an official form for evaluations, then the employee should use the same form and complete it about their own performance. Supervisors cannot be everywhere all the time to observe their employees' behavior. Completing an honest self-evaluation gives the employee an opportunity to document all the items they want their supervisor to become informed about. It also gives them the chance to show that the frequent discussions they've had with their supervisor have been heard and their need to grow is noted and understood.

Step Three: Supervisor's Written Appraisal

Of course, this step is a standard requirement within most companies. Again, the focus on the appraisal document should be performance versus goals and objectives. So, this step should take considerable time to complete and should be completed before the scheduled performance appraisal discussion. Here's why:

Step Four- Appraisal Document Exchange

In this step, the supervisor and employee exchange their respective appraisal documents. Limited discussion is needed here. It is simply a heads up

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for both people to see what the other is thinking about relative to the employee's job performance. It also gives each person a chance to prepare their approach to the upcoming formal discussion.

This step provides the supervisor with more control of the items in the document. For those companies new to this exchange process, it is not uncommon that the employee's first attempt is merely a test of the new system, filled with undocumented or not observed positive performance. If this happens the supervisor simply returns the document to the employee with some guidance about accuracy and honesty.

Step Five – The Performance Appraisal Discussion

The primary result of this meeting is the official documentation of employee performance. Some supervisors like to complete a new performance document during the meeting, representing the content they and the employee have both contributed about the employee. This third compilation is the one that goes into the employee's file.

The conversation during the discussion is now structured around those areas of positive performance against goals where both parties agree, as well as improvement areas accepted by both. Both can now adjust their goals. The employee's voice is heard and the supervisor still controls the documentation of performance.

One additional note: when the performance appraisal discussion ends with a salary adjustment, the performance content of the discussion becomes minor and is often ignored. If possible, the salary adjustment and the performance appraisal results should be separate events and not conducted at the same time.

The effectiveness and consistency of the performance appraisal system is a vital part of company health. When that system is well designed and supervisors and employees understand the process and purpose of the system, a solidly effective means of communication is prevalent throughout the company.

