



Performance Appraisals: Develop a Plan

Employees and managers often dread performance appraisals. Supervisors may feel that appraisals are a formality rather than a useful tool- in short, a waste of time. Other managers may feel uncomfortable sitting in judgment of others, especially if the evaluation includes criticism. With planning, however, performance appraisals can be invaluable for the entire organization.

Consider context and the big picture

First, be aware that performance appraisals will not work effectively in a vacuum. You need context in which to measure progress or construct criticism, so the appraisal process should be designed with the goals of the entire organization in mind. The golden rule when preparing for a performance appraisal should be to remember the employee's role in the company and how she can help meet those goals. Appraisals can encourage greater productivity from employees, provide documentation for raises and assist in personnel decisions such as promotions, demotions, transfers and terminations.

Similarly, don't focus the appraisal on one aspect of the employee's performance. Some organizations provide review forms; others may let managers decide the appraisal format. Either way, think about the big picture- assessments should cover past performance, future goals and professional development or training. Make a real effort to plan original objectives rather than recycle them year after year. And try to avoid the missteps that can occur during the appraisal process.

Avoid common mistakes

One of the most serious mistakes supervisors make may be assuming a negative or indifferent attitude toward appraisals. If managers don't value the process, those feelings can filter down to employees. Try approaching more senior managers about making changes if you question the format of your organization's performance appraisals.

Other common mistakes include:

- relying on inadequately defined performance standards
- overemphasizing recent poor performance or outstanding achievements
- overrating favored employees or underrating less-favored employees
- failing to provide sufficient documentation for the performance appraisal
- applying generic appraisals to all employees in a group
- failing to clearly explain performance standards to employees
- talking too much without allowing the employee to contribute his feelings
- scheduling too little time for the performance review meeting

Develop a plan

To help avoid mistakes in the appraisal process, create an individualized performance and development plan with each employee. Even if your organization relies on standard appraisal forms, the plan forms the keystone of the review process. It should include work goals as well as professional development, such as completing a training course.

You and the employee should agree on a limited number of specific, time-bound and measurable objectives that are realistic yet require growth. If you have identified problems, outline behavior changes the employee needs to make. Discuss progress or obstacles often throughout the year.

Prepare

Start preparing in advance- ideally at the same time you and the employee agree on a performance and development plan for the coming year. To provide a clear and unbiased appraisal of the employee's progress, collect documentation throughout the year. It may help to keep a performance log, noting significant developments. Make sure you stick to the facts; don't make any premature judgments as you collect documentation.

Continue preparation until the appraisal interview. If you ask for a self-evaluation at the end of the year, allow plenty of time for the employee to write it and for you to review it. If you have questions about the self-evaluation, ask the employee early so that you have more information to use for your appraisal.

Before you write the appraisal, gather all your documentation, including the previous appraisal, your notes, feedback from customers or colleagues and disciplinary memos.

Write the appraisal

Using your organization's form or your own outline, cover all the bases- past performance, future goals and professional development or training. Even if you plan to create the performance and development plan later with the employee, write some of your own ideas first. Formulate positive goals. For example, instead of writing, "You always miss deadlines," note that the employee should develop a plan for meeting deadlines.

As you write the appraisal, keep performance standards in mind to use as a guide. Make your evaluations as precise as possible and use specific examples. Before the employee interview, review the appraisal with your manager or the appropriate person in your company's human resources department.

Get off on the right foot

Schedule the appraisal interview well in advance at a time convenient for both you and the employee. Plan to talk in a private, neutral location. Don't make jokes about the process, but keep the atmosphere relaxed. And make sure you come prepared to let the employee talk. Maintaining an honest, open environment can help ensure future progress.

Sources:

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