

Performance Appraisals: Key to Strong Staff

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What are the purposes of conducting performance appraisals?

Set clear expectations & outlining future goals. The document that goes in the employee's file, as well as the act of creating the document together, establish mutually understood expectations for short term and long term performance.

Document accomplishments as well as unmet expectations. The employee file is the only official record of an employee's successes and failures. Calling upon these documents will be helpful when you consider the employee for promotion, when you initiate disciplinary procedures, when you are asked to provide a salary increase, or when you are in a position to provide an employment reference.

What are the main elements of an appraisal tool?

There are a wide variety of on-line and written tools available for you to use free or to purchase. However, most incorporate some common elements:

Description of current role and responsibilities. This could be an attached job description, a paragraph summarizing duties, or an outline of tasks and activities.

Rating of performance in relation to established goals and/or objectives. This could be a scale from 1 to 5, a series of ratings such as "Meets Expectations" and "Exceeds Expectations," or an area for a more in depth assessment with one or more paragraphs of details and examples.

Outline of future goals. The planned performance review meeting is an ideal setting for the supervisor and employee to discuss the goals each has for the position and the organization. Any additional responsibilities can be identified and any areas where improvement is required should be clearly articulated. Whenever possible, broad goals should be accompanied by specific and measurable objectives.

Professional development opportunities. Performance appraisals provide an opportunity to compare an employee's skills and training with current and future responsibilities. Together, an employee and supervisor can identify training needs or professional development interests and create a plan for the employee to continue his or her development. Remember, this is another great way to retain talented staff!

Employee comments. In many organizations, employees are given an opportunity to present their own comments to accompany their review form. This could be

in the form of a blank section at the end of a standard form, a separate letter prepared by the employee, etc.

Signatures. Supervisors and employees should both sign and date the permanent appraisal document and each should retain their own copies. An employee doesn't have to agree with the contents of the appraisal, but should be required to sign the form acknowledging receipt of the information.

How often should I evaluate employee performance?

You are always in a position to observe and acknowledge employee performance. However, most groups establish a timeline for employee reviews ranging from quarterly to biannually to annually. All employees may be reviewed during an evaluation 'season,' perhaps related to year end or another relevant time period. In other offices, evaluations are conducted at the time of the employee's annual anniversary. Sometimes there are more frequent evaluations in the initial period after hire, such as every three months, and then shifted to annual reviews after the end of a probation period. Regardless, all employees should know when and how they will be evaluated so there are no surprises.

How do I involve employees in the process?

There are many philosophies on performance reviews - enough to fill entire college courses. You can have a process that ranges from very simple to very involved. You may have a basic form that you fill out and then review with the employee during a private meeting. In some organizations, the employees fill out the same or different forms reflecting on their own performance and submit their document to the supervisor in advance of the review meeting. There are also evaluation processes where employees are given an opportunity to provide feedback regarding the performance of coworkers and even supervisors.

Employees are often encouraged to think about their review meeting in advance so that in addition to past performance, they can also discuss their goals for the future. Many sample evaluation tools and templates are available online or in library books and should be shared with employees when they are hired so they can know what to expect at their first review.

Where can I learn more?

Try these web sites for some samples and suggestions:

http://www.managementhelp.org/perf_mng/appraisl.htm

http://performance-appraisals.org/appraisal-library/Forms_Letters_and_Other_Tools/

<http://hrweb.berkeley.edu/forms/pedescr.htm>