



Ten Steps to a Meaningful Performance Management System

By Debbie Bortolussi MBA, CHRP

Most large companies have a formal procedure for reviewing the performance of employees. It typically consists of a performance review form completed by a supervisor, which then becomes the focal point of an appraisal interview between the supervisor and the employee. Most are intended to document performance quality so that future decisions about promotion, salary, or job functions might be justified. More importantly, the goal of the performance review is used to improve/enhance the performance of those being reviewed.

1. Base the review on performance expectations.

Base the performance review on explicit expectations of the company and the supervisor. There should be a consistent message for all job functions within the company.

2. Minimize the prominence and importance of numbers.

While you may use either numbers or labels to quantify performance, clearly state exactly on the form what the employee must do to achieve excellence.

3. Reveal the form early.

Most employees see the performance review form when it's time for the evaluation. Discuss the evaluation process during the initial interview. Once hired provide them with a copy during their orientation period and go over the process once again to ensure understanding and clarity.

4. Review performance often.

The typical review process is once a year. Try mandating twice yearly meetings for informal evaluations or better yet, quarterly. Keep on top of things before it becomes too late to fix the problem. Then everyone can discuss if there are any road blocks to success of the objectives set out.

5. Train all team members on the process and how to deliver feedback.

Serious morale problems are created when employees believe they aren't being evaluated consistently and fairly. Deliver a minimum of one hour of instruction each year for your managers to ensure they are applying your system as intended.

6. Incorporate self-assessments.

Have employees assess themselves on the form one week before the appraisal interview and have them provide you with a copy.

7. Generate upward feedback.

Two-way performance reviews work both ways. Employees should be able to comment on the quality of the direct supervision they receive. This is a helpful tool for improving leadership for the manager. Your company may want to consider a 360 Degree Review process.

8. Require follow-up meetings.

Each appraisal meeting should be followed in about a month by a coaching follow-up where performance progress is assessed, and where new improvement suggestions might be made. Everyone wants to feel that their contributions to the company are valued.

9. Consider separating reviews from evaluations.

Evaluation tends to generate defensiveness, but performance improvement requires openness and an enthusiastic willingness to change. I recommend setting up two different time frames – one hour minimum. Each of your team members will value the time you spend with them.

10. Re-examine the system.

Ask both Reviewer and Reviewee how well the system is working for them. Get new ideas from other companies who feel they have good systems. Review yours for possible revisions each year. This is part of the “Best Practices Rule” – continuous improvement.

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