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Performance Reviews - An Employer's Guide to Effectual Performance Evaluations

Just as any other type of relationship requires good communication and effort, so does the supervisor-employee relationship. For employers desiring to build or keep a superior team of workers, who each bring a valuable set of skills to the table, conducting annual or quarterly performance reviews have proven to be quite beneficial.

This guide will provide you with a few important suggestions that will help you and your employees effectively prepare and conduct regular performance reviews and then apply them towards professional expansion - both for the near and long-term future.

Exercise Honesty and Fairness

The purpose of performance evaluations is to take a realistic snapshot of an employee's performance. Keep in the mind that these reviews are intended to measure how an employee directly contributes to the goals and productivity of the company and provide necessary opportunities for his career development. It is beneficial for both parties to give the sufficient time and thought in preparing and participating in a constructive review.

Use a fixed approach for every staff member. It is vital that you review all of your employees as individuals and relative to other employees in the group - from an objective and consistent standpoint. Don't create excuses for one employee while holding another accountable. Define your criteria for each level of ranking and use the same criteria for every individual.

Be realistic in ranking his performance. Don't say the employee is improving if he is not performing well. Inflation of ratings only inflates an employee's expectations and, furthermore, takes away from his ongoing career development in your company and other workplaces in the future.

Make comments consistent with ratings. Without a written comment, a performance ranking is useless. If scaling from one to five, comments should be required for any ranking that is less than three (meets expectations) and also for the highest ranking of five (exceeds expectations). Leave comments that are constructive or confirm the achievements assigned to the ranking. Don't give someone a "meets expectations" ranking and then describe a substandard performance in your comments.

Rate his performance, not his personality. Only use comments that are job related and based on the employee's ability to perform his job. Avoid phrases like "bad attitude," "not a team player," "hard to get along with" and other subjective comments. Instead, explain the behavior by giving specific examples that illustrate the negative results of the "attitude."

Foster Motivation and Growth

A productive performance evaluation helps you and your employee gain a better understanding of whether both of your expectations are being met. Just as you expect him to play a role in the growth of your company, you should provide an atmosphere that encourages skill development and professional advancement. Recognize that growth for an employee means growth for the whole company.

You can take responsibility for using the annual or quarterly

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performance review to support each worker's professional development at the company in a few different ways.

Motivate an employee to improve. An employee should feel excited about the challenges and his ability to meet them. If employees hear only about their failures and weaknesses, they'll start to believe they can't succeed. Make sure to lead with positive feedback, because this is also your chance to express appreciation for the value they add to your business.

If employees get support and encouragement from their supervisor, they'll gain the desire and confidence to keep trying. When the supervisor's suggestions for improvement bring results - and recognition - employees are even more likely to listen to future suggestions.

Set goals with the employee. Don't just criticize; set goals for follow up and improvement. Work together to create a plan of action, which will assist the employee in underperforming areas, and establish goals to address those issues in the coming year. Schedule a follow-up meeting to reevaluate his progress.

Leave no surprises. The evaluation is a review of the past year's performance. Through previous counseling and other communications, the employee should already be aware of any concerns you have about their job performance. This should not be the first time the employee learns of your concerns.

Prepare self-appraisals. A valuable tool that many employers are starting to utilize, the self-appraisal allows employees to review their own performance and expectations for the future. They can fill out the same evaluation form that you use or draft a list of their performance strengths and weaknesses and professional goals. By having your employees go through the same exercise, they may also better understand the value of the evaluation process.

Employ a Performance Improvement Plan

The purpose of a Performance Improvement Plan is to communicate the specific job performance areas that do not meet expected standards. It is typically implemented, at the discretion of the supervisor, when it becomes necessary to help an employee improve his performance. In all cases, it's recommended that you review the plan with Human Resources, so that you'll ensure consistent and fair treatment of all staff members.

Develop the process for individual improvement. Clearly state why the employee's job performance is a concern and how it impacts the work environment. Summarize the facts and events that necessitate the development of a Performance Improvement Plan.

Establish specific and measurable steps to improve performance and include the employee's ideas for improvement. Establish reasonable timelines for improved performance on each expectation.

Then, you'll want to conduct periodic reviews on a regular basis to monitor progress being made toward the expected outcome and provide feedback. Communicate consequences for failure to meet expectations and sustain improved performance.

Implement your company's plan. Document each step of the Performance Improvement Plan. As you sit down with an employee, provide constructive feedback to help him understand how he is doing and what is expected. Focus on the job and not on the person. Concentrate on a specific behavior to help him understand what you want and why, so that the individual will feel less defensive.

Example with focus on behavior: "Your report is two days late."

Example with focus on person: "You are not very reliable about getting things done on time."

Always meet with the employee and provide an opportunity for discussion and feedback. At the end of the Performance Improvement Plan period, the supervisor will determine if the process was

satisfactorily completed or if progressive discipline will be implemented in conjunction with Human Resources.

The most important thing you can do to improve the productivity of regular performance reviews is to take them seriously. Model the same positive attitude about preparing for the review that you expect him to have when receiving your ratings and suggestions for improvement. You should place importance in conducting evaluations, as you will find that your employees will put as much value as you do in them.

To get some fresh ideas on creating or improving your employee evaluations, refer to the following examples of employee evaluation forms:

Sample	Title	Complexity / Time Commitment 1 Simple - 4 Complex
A	Performance Development Plan and Staff Goal Planning [DOC]	3
B	Staff Performance and Development Review Form [DOC]	2
C	Performance Review [DOC]	4
D	Annual Performance Review [DOC]	4