



## Putting the *Value* Back in Performance Evaluations

**A** cynical definition of performance appraisal: *Feedback from people who don't want to give it, given to people who don't want to receive it.*

Far too often, in small and large businesses alike, this is the dreary reputation of performance evaluations. Though most organizations see value in conducting performance reviews, most givers and receivers of feedback dislike the experience—often intensely. The result: Disposable evaluations and wasted time and effort.

And yet, performance appraisals could actually be used to inspire employees, not make them perspire. When we inject *value* into performance evaluations, the result can be a roadmap for development and a rewarding process of discovery for both givers and receivers.

*Value* means worth, from the Latin verb, *valere*: “to be worth, to be strong.” The strength of a business is equal to the strength of its co-workers; thus, focusing on the growth of employees supports the well-being of the entire company.

### Flaws in the Evaluation System

The problem is that performance appraisals for all employees are often completed annually within a short timeframe, which doesn't usually lend itself well to careful, honest, well-thought-out evaluations for each employee. Standardized forms end up looking like cookie cutter documents with similar wording, strengths and weaknesses.

*On a scale of one to five, rate the employee's enthusiasm.*

Who could possibly be enthusiastic about such a stale process?

Other problems with the typical employee review system are:

- Doing all the appraisals at once can create a tendency to compare and rank employees, which takes away the individual assessment of strengths and weaknesses, and can put employees on the defensive. It fosters an atmosphere of competitiveness rather than excellence.
- Salary increases, bonuses, promotion opportunities are directly connected with the appraisal. Ideally, these matters are kept separate from performance appraisals.
- The performance evaluation is used as an opportunity to

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discipline employees or address work rule violations (e.g., lack of attendance, punctuality, etc.), which should be addressed separately from a performance review meeting.

- Performance appraisals are too often used to document performance issues that should have been addressed throughout the year. Or, the results of performance appraisals are ignored the rest of the year.
- Overworked supervisors may make hasty judgments based on recent performance, not the entire year's.
- What is measured is irrelevant to real work performance and does not differentiate true levels of quality. In other words, there may be lots of data, but no real information.
- Self-evaluation is not valued or often-enough used in the performance appraisal process. An evaluation done without access to an employee's self-evaluation will be missing important information.
- The process is tedious and dull—just another project to get done—rather than creative, vital and truly informative.

## Evaluations of Value

Evaluations of value contain both elements of review and discovery. In these, managers can work with their people to set short-term and long-term objectives that benefit both company and employee. Education and training goals, as well as opportunities to work with a coach, also would be examined. Understanding employees' professional goals enables managers to lead and guide them in more targeted and meaningful ways.

When we focus on developing the employees we supervise, we give the gift of recognition and support, a gift that will return in the form of enhanced performance and benefit to the company. Here are a few recommendations on writing and giving an evaluation of value:

- Keep track of performance over the course of the year with a log. This is the place to note memorable incidents involving the individual, such as overtime worked beyond expectations, unexplained absences, extra efforts on behalf of the company. Give immediate feedback in situations where warranted and note such feedback in the log. This log is a legal document and is not the place for venting frustration about an employee.
- Find a time and place to write without interruption. Hold in your mind as you proceed an image of the person you are evaluating. Write up your appraisal based on objective observation. If you solicit input from others in the company, request facts, not opinions.
- The actual performance evaluation interview

should take place after self-evaluation and manager evaluation forms have been completed.

- Acknowledge and thank the individual for her or his contributions to the company.
- Articulate clear employee goals and performance standards. Employee goals are specific to the individual, depending on his or her strengths and weaknesses. Words carry impact and need to be chosen carefully. Always state performance standards and goals in the positive.
- Align the employee's goals with the needs of the company.
- Listen, as well as talk. The process will seem more fair to employees if the opportunity to express their concerns, as well, is provided.
- Include education and training opportunities, as well as new assignments or other activities, to further the employee's career goals.
- Ensure that the employee has the necessary tools and support to achieve the objectives. Then spend the rest of the year coaching your employee every day for maximum performance!

## Self-Evaluation

Most individuals want to improve their skills and performance, and they rarely rate themselves too high. Be open to discovering more about your employees—and yourself!—through self-evaluation. Here are some suggestions for self-evaluation questions:

1. What accomplishments do I consider significant in the last year?
2. What could be even better?
3. What prevents me from doing my best work?
4. How do I add value to the firm today?
5. How does this position add to my portfolio of experiences?
6. Would I like to work with a mentor? If so, whom?
7. Will working with a coach bolster my value?
8. What are the most important goals I want to accomplish in the next year?
9. What resources, including education or training, could help me meet my goals?
10. How else could my manager/supervisor help me?
11. How do my customers feel that I add value for them?
12. What value do I provide my coworkers that adds value for them?
13. What sort of measurements do I use to quantify how I create value?
14. What type of additional training or education will further enhance my value?