# Performance Feedback October 7, 2008

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# Performance Feedback

### Hallmarks of Quality Performance Reviews and Feedback:

- Regular and frequent
- Tailored to the employee being reviewed
- Clear, descriptive and specific
- Focus is on behavior, rather than the individual
- Well-planned in advance
- Time for discussion allowed
- Based upon carefully crafted performance measures

# Performance Feedback

### Feedback Techniques to Avoid:

- Providing feedback only when something is wrong
- Nonspecific feedback (such as, "great job!")
- Delayed feedback (providing feedback infrequently or after an issue has long passed)
- Providing feedback without an in-person meeting
- Feedback without suggestions for improvement
- Providing a raise without feedback

# Performance Feedback

### **Exercises**

Consider the following three scenarios, which present the challenges of reviewing different types employees.

Brian is an overachiever. He performs outstanding work, both in quantity and quality, and spends long hours at the office.

But, you have some areas of concern. Brian prefers to work alone and easily loses patience with others. He shows blatant disregard for co-workers' opinions. He has little patience for office protocol, which he refers to as "red tape," and doesn't like to be told what to do. Brian also tends to dwell unnecessarily on minor details, which sometimes elongates the time it takes for him to get his work done.

What are some things to keep in mind when providing feedback to Brian?

### Performance Feedback – Scenario 1

Overachievers can be very difficult to supervise. They need constant communication because they require much positive feedback to keep them motivated. At the same time, they need to be coached on better ways to interact with their supervisor and co-workers.

#### Recommendations for the review:

- Praise them for the work that they have done well. They need positive reinforcement to keep motivated.
- □ Provide specific, genuine, and ongoing feedback.
- Try to determine their personal long-range goals and tie their current assignments to these goals.
- Coach overachievers in listening and group problem solving techniques to help develop collaboration skills.
- Reward the results of their work rather than the amount of time they work, which may help them to avoid dwelling unnecessarily on minor details.
- Let them know that sometimes it is OK to fail. Overachievers find it very difficult to cope with failure. Examine the parts of the failed project that did work.

# Performance Feedback - Scenario 1

#### Ongoing recommendations:

- Involve overachievers in decision making and planning so that they realize that their opinion is valued.
- Provide mentoring programs to overachievers so that they can obtain wise counsel on workplace challenges and develop new skills.
- Don't stand for episodes of swearing, yelling, or walking out of meetings.
  This must be addressed immediately.
- Overachievers are prone to burnout. Therefore, look for signs of this and make sure that they are taking their lunch breaks and vacations when necessary.
- Remove any unnecessary obstacles or barriers that may cause frustration to overachievers in order to help them be successful.

Kathy, your employee of 2 years performs at a satisfactory level. Her work product is serviceable with only minor edits and usually is on time. She is able to work with other employees and maintains cordial relationships with stakeholders.

However, although Kathy's work is on time, it is usually delivered at 5 p.m. the day of the deadline, indicating procrastination. Additionally, while her work is acceptable, she does not seek to deepen her understanding of issues, propose creative ideas or reach out to other employees in the division to improve her understanding of the division and therefore her work product.

Kathy works only as much as necessary and seems to have little enthusiasm for her job or professional development.

### Performance Feedback – Scenario 2

Providing feedback to satisfactory employees is difficult because necessary work product is completed competently. The missing factors are intangible and may not be reflected in the employee's position description. Therefore, the job of the reviewer motivator more than critic.

#### Recommendations for the review:

- Be sure to praise the employee for a job well done.
- Emphasize instances in which the employee exhibited the types of behaviors you seek to encourage and amplify.
- Identify opportunities for training and suggest them to the employee or make them a part of the employee's training plan.
- Discuss the employee's long-term career goals. Identify tasks or opportunities related to the employee's job that dovetail with these goals to spur interest.
- Review the ways in which the employee's performance affects the division's or the agency's business in a positive way.

# Performance Feedback – Scenario 2

#### Recommendations for the review, continued:

- Set goals for the upcoming year, and include items such as the employee conducting 3 information-gathering meetings with other division employees.
- End on a positive note.
- Revise performance measures or the position description to reflect the expectation that the employee take more ownership of his or her work performance.

### Ongoing recommendations:

- □ Provide positive feedback on as regular a basis as possible.
- Continue discussions with employee regarding progression toward personal goals and the contributions the employee makes to the organization.

Joe has worked for the state for over 15 years in the same position. He has had performance issues in the past 3 years. His supervisor counseled him through the situation by telling him that he needed to get help for his personal issues and get his job done. The supervisor did not counsel him about the possibility of placing him on a concentrated PPD.

After this counseling, Joe filed a harassment complaint stating that the manager harassed him to do his work and showed favoritism to others because he didn't harass the others. The resolution of the harassment claim took over a month.

After resolution, the supervisor continued to receive phone calls about Joe's work performance and will now need to discuss with him the concerns.

### Performance Feedback – Scenario 3

Providing feedback to problem employees is generally the most challenging feedback scenario for supervisors. Both parties in the feedback session are likely to feel highly uncomfortable and to seek to address the situation in a hurried or incomplete way that may not result in improved performance.

Particularly when an employee's personal behavior, in addition to poor work performance, is of issue, care must be taken to plan for a performance review carefully.

#### Recommendations for the review:

- Manage yourself, your emotions and demeanor and remain calm, logical and factual. Avoid getting defensive.
- Determine the nature of the problem. Is this a conduct or performance issue? If it is performance rather than conduct, assess the causes for failure.
- Assess your role as the supervisor in the failure to perform. What steps have you taken as the supervisor to help the employee meet minimum standards?
- Develop a plan for improving performance. Work with Human Resources so that all applicable rules and procedures are followed. The plan is important and can quantifiably detail how the you and the employee will improve the situation.
- Avoid counseling the employee about personal problems or commenting upon the employee's personality.
- Avoid talking down to the employee.
- Base feedback on previously established goals or performance measures.

## Performance Feedback – Scenario 3

#### Ongoing recommendations:

- Provide negative feedback in small, manageable doses. Give the employee the time to digest the information and make corrections.
- Feedback should build on an already established relationship between supervisor and employee. When major challenges are presented, trust should already be established.
- Clear goals should be worked out with the employee ahead of time and constant feedback given. Performance feedback in an annual review should not be a surprise.
- Be savvy about what's going on around you and be able to read between the lines when communicating with your employees.