

Making Performance Appraisals Effective

By Lisa Perry

Are performance appraisals necessary in today's business world? Yes, the appraisal is an important opportunity for the employee and employer to sit down and evaluate the prior year's performance. Work performance cannot be improved unless it is measured. The actual appraisal meeting should be scheduled so that both parties can sit down and have an uninterrupted discussion. Discussing the current year's performance can also facilitate setting goals for the upcoming year. The discussion is also an excellent way to help identify training needs, help an employee learn more about his or her weaknesses, and strengthen the employee/employer relationship.

For the employer, it is important to have a written policy for the performance appraisal process. There should be a written form to complete along with standard criteria against which to evaluate the employee. Job performance should be evaluated based upon an updated job description. The employer should cite specific examples in the appraisal and the employee should be allowed the opportunity to provide feedback. In many cases, employers require the employee to complete a self evaluation first, giving the employer an idea

of how the employee thinks he or she has performed.

Most employers and employees dread the time of year when appraisals roll around. It's hard to remember the items that need to be addressed during the appraisal process and even harder to find the time to put those thoughts in writing. Performance appraisals do not have to be a dreaded part of the job.

One way to make the process easier is to meet with employees more frequently. Once the annual goals have been determined, employers should consider meeting with employees quarterly to assess goals. Have an open discussion to determine the current performance and evaluate how to move forward. Meeting quarterly also allows for changes that may be needed due to workplace happenings. For example, goals may need to be changed if the company has acquired a large contract and someone needs to change responsibilities. Perhaps an employee has been promoted or resigned or the workforce has been downsized. Quarterly appraisals are definitely a time and place to evaluate and change work assignments and goals. If an employee does not feel comfortable with goals that were origi-

nally agreed upon, the quarterly appraisal can be used to discuss the problems and determine the proper course of action. If meeting quarterly is too time consuming, the employer should consider meeting with all employees at least twice each year.

It is critical to the performance appraisal process to keep the lines of communication open. Employers should always take the opportunity to acknowledge a job well done. By the same token, if an employee is not performing up to standards, it is better to go ahead and address the problem immediately rather than wait. If the lack of performance is addressed verbally, the discussion should be documented. If the poor performance continues, the employer should continue to document the steps that are being taken to address the performance. This documentation is necessary not only for the appraisal process but can be used if the lack of performance leads to termination. The bottom line is that the employee needs to be immediately made aware if the employer is unhappy with his or her performance. No one wants to be surprised during the performance appraisal meeting.

Having a written performance appraisal policy, taking the time to

meet with employees, and keeping the lines of communication open are relatively simple ways to increase the effectiveness of the appraisal process. Hopefully, following the above suggestions will also make the

Business Sense



performance appraisal process less stressful for everyone.

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