



WORDS ON WISE MANAGEMENT

Performance appraisals: the good, the bad, and the ugly

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Sooner or later it will be that much-dreaded time of the year when annual performance appraisals are due. To make matters worse, there's always at least one team member who will drag the process out with questions about every single notation on his appraisal. So there you go, headed down the road of conflict.

Remember that one of the main objectives of the performance appraisal process is to develop staff members and improve their contribution to the team. However, in many cases, both the leader and the staff member dread the performance meeting. How can you possibly turn that into a positive? Here are a few suggestions to help you improve your current performance appraisal process while relieving some of the stress the task often inflicts on both parties involved.

Ensure you've set clear, measurable goals at the beginning of the appraisal period. Too often the goals on performance appraisals are too subjective. Remember the old adage "You can't manage what you can't measure." Team members should ask for clarification on anything that's unclear or vague at the beginning of the appraisal period.

Set aside time to meet regularly with each staff member to discuss performance. Performance meetings need to be focused solely on performance. Don't discuss other issues during a performance meeting or you'll diminish the importance of what you're trying to accomplish. The more you can meet and discuss performance prior to the actual performance appraisal process, the smoother the overall process will go. Once a month is great, but if you can only meet every other month with a solid agenda, that should suffice.

If your manager cannot commit to meeting regularly, that may present more of a challenge and

could be an indication of how she feels about the appraisal process. Staff members must push the issue. Your manager will respect staff members who show commitment to self-development because improving performance is high on just about every manager's wish list.

Go over specific performance goals at monthly meetings. Each subsequent meeting will provide an opportunity to gauge the staff member's progress since the previous meeting. Examine how he exceeded the performance goals or what needs to be improved upon to achieve the goals. Staff members should ask specific questions about how they can exceed performance goals.

Document and talk about the staff member's strengths and successes on the appraisal. This will reinforce the good behavior you want her to repeat. At this point, it should be a red flag if you're thinking, "What if the staff member doesn't have strengths and successes to point out?" If that's the case, the employee should already be in the performance improvement process.

When administered correctly, performance appraisals can be a very effective development tool for any organization. If you wait until near the end of the appraisal period to gather your data, far too often you'll really only capture the last few months of the appraisal period. Put in the work early, and the end result will be a smoother process for everyone involved.



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