



# Five Tips For Successful Performance Evaluations

Publication

12.01.13

Performance evaluation programs can be immensely beneficial to employers. They can help management improve employee performance and adjust staff expectations. However, if done improperly, performance evaluations can create more legal liability than they help to avoid.

This article lists five critical tips for making sure your performance evaluation system is on the right track.

## **Tip 1: Use A Simple Form Tailored To Your Business**

The form you use should be easy for managers and employees to understand. It must be simple and tailored to the jobs being reviewed. Don't use an off-the-shelf form or one that is too complicated for the situation. Having the right form is the foundation of the entire evaluation process.

## **Tip 2: Be Truthful—Don't Sugarcoat Things!**

As with other employer communications, honesty is absolutely essential to the evaluation process. Fairness and objectivity are also important companions to honesty. Managers cannot sugarcoat evaluations and hope that under performing employees will improve on their own. Managers who are not honest do a serious disservice to their employer. Employees need to know where they fall short and how they need to improve - before their jobs are at risk. Evaluations that appear to be at odds with an employee's "true" performance can be a real problem in litigation, too.

## **Tip 3: Cite Critical Incidents**

One of the key reasons for performance evaluations is to rehabilitate and salvage underperformers before separation from employment becomes a possibility. The best way to help employees learn and understand what is expected is to cite specific incidents of good or unsatisfactory performance. Reference to specific words or actions can show an employee what type of workplace behavior is desired or discouraged. Using specifics or critical incidents is certainly preferred to using subjective, vague or conclusory descriptions that the employee may dispute or not understand. Plus, reference to specific incidents can be very helpful in litigation to show examples of why a particular employee was subsequently terminated, not promoted or denied other opportunities.

#### **Tip 4: Be Consistent**

Inconsistent application of evaluation standards can adversely affect morale or employee involvement, indicate favoritism, or undermine respect for managers, the evaluation process and even the employer's reputation. Moreover, inconsistencies can give rise to legal claims for discrimination if they are perceived to or actually run parallel to racial, ethnic, sexual or other legally protected categories.

#### **Tip 5: Have A Central Authority Review Every Evaluation**

As a safeguard in the evaluation process, employers should assign one person to review all performance evaluations. Having one central reviewer will help to avoid unwanted trends or patterns, such as subjectivity, differences or inconsistencies among reviewers, positive or negative leanings, central tendency shifts, stereotyping, biases, undue negativity of comments, or grading based on halos or first impressions. Having a single person review evaluations can go a long way toward protecting the employer from these and other kinds of mistakes that can come back to haunt the employer in court.

#### **Conclusion**

This article lists some of the most critical elements of a successful performance evaluation program. Obviously, other elements are important as well. For example, other tips may be to train your managers, don't discriminate, adapt your program to your business and do evaluations when you say you will do them. The bottom line is that there is no substitute for an effective performance evaluation program and employers would be well advised to make sure these critical elements are present.

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