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HOW TO MAKE PERFORMACE APPRAISALS WORK

By Rolf Gruen

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Five Tips from Lee Hecht Harrison on How to Get the Most Out of This Communication Tool

During this period of corporate restructuring and cautious optimism about the economic recovery, there is one aspect of the corporate workplace that is becoming more important than ever before for companies that want to maintain a competitive edge—performance appraisal programs. Performance appraisal systems are at the core of effective communication between an organization and its employees, and reflect an increasing awareness of quality control and the necessity of identifying and maximizing individual capabilities and feedback between all parties. In fact, these systems are some of the cornerstones of improving productivity in today's ever-changing workplace.

There are two key elements necessary for implementing a successful performance appraisal system in any organization: trust and uniformity. If the integration of an appraisal system is conducted poorly or in the wrong corporate culture, it can have a boomerang effect and undermine the entire structure of the company. All members of the organization must believe that the system works for everyone in the same way, with goals cascading from executives to middle management to plant level, a foundation of cooperation and the shared understanding of prospective benefit for all.

One of the most fundamental questions that should be addressed before either beginning a new or attempting to improve an existing comprehensive performance management system is 'What do we hope to accomplish with this program?' Too often organizations attempt to start fixing the problems with their appraisal systems without starting at the beginning to redefine the process and eliminate confused or multiple purposes that will lead to the new system functioning exactly as the old one did. A new system often is handcrafted internally, although many companies will bring in a good consulting group to completely overhaul their existing system and to lend an objective viewpoint.

In this spirit, here are five tips on some crucial elements of a viable and effective performance appraisal program:

Communicate the kind of results an employee must produce to support your corporate goals and customer needs. This will help align the employees' goals with the strategy of the organization, help them understand what they need to do to progress, give them a sense of ownership and encourage

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them to make plans for further development.

Provide managers with the information they need to reward for performance. A good appraisal system will open the door for performance– related discussion and career progression opportunities, while objectively indicating areas that deserve reward and recognition and those that need to be improved upon. Keep it simple—avoid multi–page documents that can grind your organization to a halt with a blizzard of paperwork.

Look at the big picture. Too often over–worked managers can make snap judgements based on only the most recent performance, without looking at the overall contributions of an individual. Standardizing your performance appraisal system and adhering to frequent review of data and exchange of two–way communication will keep things in perspective.

Focus on the future. In referring to positive performance, make references to how it can be carried on in future endeavors and when discussing opportunities for improvement, and work toward mutual

agreement for new work habits and higher expectations. Discuss options for coaching or additional training to encourage a commitment to meet agreed upon performance outcomes.

No surprises. The savvy manager will always conduct ongoing development conversations with his or her team members, so the performance review meeting should not be the arena to discuss negative results or behaviors for the first time. Give your team members verbal feedback and adequate time to improve before documenting a problem.

It's important to consider the message you want your employees to take with them from the experience of appraisal. Be careful with assigning numbers—but do so in a consistent manner. If you are not careful, you can lose people who will be put off by a sloppy administration of performance appraisals. But if it is done carefully and well, it can maximize the capabilities of the individuals and will contribute to the well–being of the employees, management and organization as a whole.

Rolf Gruen is the senior vice president and general manager of leading career services company Lee Hecht Harrison's Seattle office.

Appraisals: Evaluating Procedures

By Barney Garcia

An appraisal is an official document given by an appraiser that estimates the replacement value and quality of an item. An appraiser makes a report after examination and detailed analysis of the property.

Types of Appraisals

Drive by Appraisals: This is an abbreviated appraisal that requires less data and inspection by the appraiser. The data is generally collected verbally or from records.

Professional Appraisals: Appraisals for personal property like estate tax, donation, sale of insurance, damage claims and equitable distribution.

Sustainability Appraisals: They are essential for national legislation that includes environmental, social

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and economic concerns.

Job Performance Appraisals: These appraisals are needed for performance rankings. They help in decision making regarding promotion, confirmation, transfer and salary fixing. These appraisals also give feedback regarding behavior of subordinates. This information helps in training, recognizing the skill of workers, their deficiencies and growth. These also play an important role in counseling subordinates. It also gives an insight into the behavior of employees.

The purposes of performance appraisals are:

- Creating and maintaining a satisfactory performance.
- Contributing to employee growth and development through training and management programs.
- Proper understanding of subordinates.
- Guidance to employees regarding jobs
- Facilitate fair compensation based on performance and interview techniques.
- Providing information regarding retrenchment.

Evaluating the work of individuals is a regular feature of companies. The appraisals made can be formally structured or an informal process. Both qualitative and quantitative aspects of job performance are evaluated during appraisals. Performance appraisal here means evaluating the amount of work and effort the individual has put in and is not evaluating the result. Performance appraisals give an insight into the employee's weakness and strengths. Job evaluation is the amount of profit the organization is deriving by assigning the job and determines the range of pay while performance appraisal is evaluating how well the job is being done by the employee.

The content to be appraised has to be decided by a company before the program is approved. This is

done on the basis of a job analysis. Appraisals help the employer to understand and improve his employee.

Barney Garcia writes about many different topics. He is a proud contributing author and invites you to his websites.

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