

## Who Will Your Replacement Be? Making The Best Job Performance Evaluations

by Robert LaFord

### PART III



#### FORMAL EVALUATIONS

Although employee evaluation and performance assessments need to be accomplished on a day-to-day basis whenever the nature of the employee's tasks or special circumstance warrants. There also is a need to conduct regular formal performance evaluations on a scheduled basis.

Formal written evaluations establish in writing the goals and objectives that the job requires and that the employee needs to meet. It also reviews how well the team has worked towards accomplishing those benchmarks. This written record is an agreement between the supervisor and the employee. It also serves to become part of the employee's record creating a personal history with the organization.

Formal evaluations should not be considered a burden to either the supervisor or the employee. The issues discussed at the formal evaluation should not be a surprise to anyone involved. Rather, the evaluation should be a review of the informal performance related interaction between the employee and the supervisor.

Both the employee and the organization need to establish the standards that are expected and ensure that the employee has the knowledge, skills and abilities to reach these standards before the task is undertaken. The supervisor must make a concerted effort to not only review the performance of his or her subordinates and communicate these findings on a daily basis, but must also register these findings so they may be referenced as specific incidents during the formal review.

Consider a supervisor and employee who can review the agreed to job requirements and specific areas, dates and issues. The employee was either headed in the right direction towards the goals – or where he or she needs re-direction or improved job coaching. Then consider how too many evaluations take place; once a year, in a neg-

ative format, telling the employee he or she needs to improve – or they're doing a good job. No specifics. No guidelines. No standards.

In the second example, the employee is going to be defensive. Even more, though, he or she is going to be confused at best because there is no direction. In the first example, however, the team of employee-supervisor know what the job requires. There are specific issues and incidents to relate to the pre-set and agreed to goals. This evaluation will promote the needs of both the employee and the organization. It will also keep the outcome and the new goals in a positive bearing for future improvement. First, because it has been participatory instead of subordinate; and second, because it has dealt with specific pre-set objectives instead of generalities.

#### THE EVALUATION

It's time to do the yearly evaluations. How do we make it worthwhile? There are four basic steps to formal performance evaluations: Preparation, communication, agreement and follow-up.

The key to effective appraisals is planning and preparation. That preparation started with the last appraisal with the employee by setting the guidelines and goals for the coming period.

With the pending evaluation, the supervisor needs to review the specifics of:

- 1) The job at hand and the requirements and needed knowledge for that job or task.
- 2) The goals, objectives and expected standards agreed to at the last evaluation
- 3) The employee's history including skills, experience, qualifications and specific notes made from informal reviews held during the past appraisal period
- 4) Past performance and performance reviews of the employee.

The second basic step of appraisals is

*Robert LaFord, Capt. – Training Officer, Orange Fire Dept. LaFord is a fifteen years veteran firefighter in Orange, Massachusetts. He is also an Instructor with the Massachusetts State Fire Academy, and a faculty member for the Mount Wachusett Community College Fire Science Program where he also serves on the advisory board.*

communication. With a cooperative agreement in regards to what is expected the employee and supervisor should be able to review the specific issues and incidents that have occurred. By knowing what is expected the parties should be able to discuss how well the goals and objectives have been met.

Having discussed the performance and how it relates to the pre-set goals, the evaluation should then turn to new goals. Does the employee need re-direction towards the goals? Does the employer need to provide additional training/ supervision, etc. This third step, Agreement, is where the communication and participation leads to the standards expected for the next appraisal period. No surprises and no unexpected challenges or vague requirements.

The final step of the formal evaluation is Follow-up. The supervisor must continue the day-to-day appraisal and interaction with the employee and the others under his or her supervision. How best can we as a team meet the goals we agreed on during the formal appraisal. This follow-up and the day-to-day interaction does not mean the supervisor needs to be hovering over the employees looking for mistakes.

On the contrary, the supervisor should be looking for positive actions of the employees to act as a reinforcement for good behavior and goal oriented actions. Positive reinforcement and recognition for a job well done will do much to boost the morale and team performance for both the individual and the group.

Formal evaluations should be part of our organizations personnel development program. The systematic development of our people into better firefighters and better employees begins with set objectives and a general direction for them to grow towards. By using a participatory review system they can help develop goals and objectives that will benefit not only improved performance for the organization, but also lend a hand to the individual trying to grow in their career. This becomes a far better team oriented

approach than each individual fending for themselves.

### THE FORM TO USE

Does it matter what printed form to use when conducting a review? There are as many forms available as there are companies and departments that promote performance evaluations. Start from scratch and utilize your people to determine what best suits your organization and your people.

Gather as many forms as you can from neighboring department, communities and businesses in your area. Talk to people who use these forms. What do they like or dislike about the particular forms used by their organization. Have a team of people within your organization do the same. Gather all this information and develop a form with the guidelines that your team feels would best suit your particular organization.

Most forms will have a grading system: Outstanding, very good, good, improvements needed, unsatisfactory, and not applicable, is one such grading example. Others may assign a point system to the terminology. Decide on the characteristics that are to be reviewed. Some may not be as applicable to your department while others may need to be added. By characteristics mean:

- Efficiency
- Receptive to Ideas
- Job Knowledge
- Reliability
- Availability
- Personal Development
- Department Drills and Training
- Emergency Work
- Leadership
- Adheres to Policy
- Interpersonal Relationships
- Safety and Judgement

Before setting off with the characteristic judgements, each of these traits must be defined. Defined as how they each fit into the organization and its goals and objectives that have been predetermined.

Beyond a checklist of characteristic traits, however, the form should force the supervisor to list specific details for the

given employee. Instead of just a checklist to obtain a numerical summary, the form should be a guide that describes how well the employee and the organization are working together towards the pre-established goals. And beyond that, the form should conclude with what direction the employee and organization should head after the review is complete. In other words, the form used should be a legitimate summary of the entire review process.

### WHO SHOULD REVIEW WHOM?

Even though everyone involved with the review process has had (or should have had) a chance to participate in the process of setting job goals and standards, each person will have different perceptions of how these goals should be dealt with to be most effective. These perceptions are neither right or wrong; it is just that different people will look at the same situation differently.

Use all of these different perceptions to optimize the review process. The review can be broken into three components: 1) Self-appraisal

2) Supervisor's appraisal, and

3) Subordinate or peer appraisal.

Since job goals, objectives and expected standards have been discussed and agreed to at an earlier time, allow the employee to appraise themselves. By allowing the person to thoughtfully review the job requirements and their own performance, most individuals will be honest about their actions. Many times an individual will be more critical of his or her performance than the supervisor would be.

The questions asked of the individual and the character traits to be pondered should be the same used by the supervisor for their part of the review. This will allow the two people to discuss the issues after each has had the opportunity to consider all the issues and specifics.

In his book, *Effective Performance Appraisals*, Robert Maddux says that there are common questions to help prepare for a performance appraisal through a self-evaluation.

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These questions are to help the individual think about their own performance, progress and plans for future growth.

- What critical abilities does my job require? To what extent do I fulfill them?
- What do I like best about my job? Least?
- What were my specific accomplishments during this appraisal period?
- Which goals or standards did I fall short of meeting?
- How could my supervisor help me do a better job?
- Is there anything that the organization or my supervisor does that hinders my effectiveness?
- What changes would improve my performance?
- Does my present job make the best use of my capabilities? How could I become more productive?
- What do I expect to be doing five years from now?
- Do I need more experience or training in any aspect of my current job? How could it be accomplished?
- What have I done since my last appraisal to prepare myself for more responsibility?
- What new goals and standards should be established for the next appraisal period? Which old ones need to be modified or deleted?

The second part of the evaluation is done by the supervisor. He or she should answer the same questionnaire or form that the employee did for their self-appraisal. If the expectations have been spelled out and understood previously, these two appraisals should be very similar.

The area that should generate the most discussion are those that the employee and the supervisor have shown significant differences in their perception or opinion. If there are discrepancies in certain areas it may show that the goals and standards that have been set have not been understood between the employee and the organization. This should be one area that new goals and objectives are established

and clarified for the next appraisal period.

The appraisal process should not be a one-sided lecture on the part of the supervisor. To benefit the organization and the employee the most, the appraisal should involve considerable dialogue and interaction between the supervisor and the employee. This is a big step for many supervisors because it is asking them to listen, and many times accept, another person's opinion and point of view. Being the employee that deals with the issues on a daily basis places him or her in a situation that they may see the problem and the solution differently than the supervisor. By allowing the employee to participate in the planning process to alleviate any potential problems, the chances for success are much greater.

Subordinate or peer reviews of supervisors is the third area of performance appraisal that may offer valuable insight to personnel development. If a supervisor, like a company officer, is reviewed by his or her superior only, that person's appraisal is often limited to the amount of interaction between those two people during normal working time. A different way to approach evaluations of supervisory personnel is to allow their subordinates or peers to conduct the evaluation.

These people work with the supervisor more closely on a day-to-day basis than normally do the superior officers. Their insight into the leader's abilities will be very astute; but, also will usually be more in tune with the effectiveness of the supervisor. Subordinates and peers won't normally "hold punches" because they want their team to be as efficient as possible. To achieve this top performance both the team members and the team leaders need to pursue their own personal excellence as well as pushing the team's performance.

Allowing the subordinates and peers to participate in the process will help the team grow professionally. One point to consider is to allow the subordinate reviews to be done anonymously. This will help keep any supervisor who is reviewed poorly from seeking revenge on the subordinate.

Beyond the terms and characteristics previously agreed upon for the general reviews, subordinate reviews of supervisors may include other areas pertinent to the supervisor's leadership abilities. Traits to consider may deal with group performance, technical knowledge, initiative in task assignments, as well as delegation, career counseling of the group, etc.

By using any of the performance reviews as a development tool, the organization can mold it's training programs to best suit the needs of the organization and the individuals. This becomes an option to the organization because it listens to its members.

So we've come full circle. Through our appraisals and formal reviews we have identified good work related traits of the employee as well as areas that need work. The goals and objectives to meet those goals have also been formulated for future performance.

Through follow-up, the supervisor's interaction with the employee on a day-to-day will help the employee best develop within the organization. This is our systematic approach to improving the personnel development within our organization. The organization has taken an active roll in promoting improved performance through setting goals and standards – and has allowed the employee to participate in this process. The organization has not only identified the areas where there needs to be personal growth; but also works with the employee through job coaching to see that this growth is accomplished.

In all our training throughout our careers, recruit training on-sight training, officer training, etc., the emphasis is on teamwork. For a fire company and a fire department to function effectively it must operate as a team. Professional development, personnel evaluation, career coaching, and the like within the fire department can best serve both the individual and the organization through teamwork also. Our firefighters want to be the best

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**R.E.S.P.O.N.D. ACT –  
TO ESTABLISH NATIONAL FIRE  
SERVICE TERRORISM RESPONSE  
COMMISSION  
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“On this day the fire service will speak out – to Congress, and to the Clinton Administration – that they will not sit quietly while their concerns go unheard. The fire community will make their voices heard and they will demand action,” Weldon continued.

Fire Service Caucus Chairman, Rob Andrews (D-NJ) added that his support of this bill and the fire service is unwavering. He drew huge response from the crowd of nearly 1,000 emergency service onlookers when he said, “Those who respond first must be funded first.”

Another long-time fire service advocate, Steny Hoyer (D-MD) added his voice to the call for establishing the commission. He said, “The fire service has long gone unrecognized here on Capital Hill. It is time that members of Congress get behind the fire service by providing the funds necessary to be prepared to respond to terrorist acts.”

The RESPOND Commission will have the power to subpoena information, hold hearings and take sworn testimony for the purpose of carrying out the Act. The Bill also authorizes the commission to secure information directly from any department or agency of the United States.

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**NEXT LEVEL NEWS  
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In the 1980s the ATCC shipped 70 vials of anthrax, botulism and other deadly substances to Iraqi scientists with approval from the U.S. Commerce Department, according to a report in the Wall Street Journal.

The Journal article also stated that in 1995, ATCC mailed three vials of bubonic plague organisms to Larry Wayne Harris, a reputed white supremacist who was recently arrested in conjunction with the anthrax bacteria threat in Las Vegas.

In the 1995 case, a suspicious ATCC technician contacted the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention in Atlanta days after shipping the plague organisms to Mr. Harris. Investigators discovered that Harris, a trained microbiologist, had falsely claimed he owned the laboratory that asked for the plague specimens. Harris eventually served 18 months in prison on fraud charges after pleading guilty.

The ATCC is not the only place in the world to go to obtain lethal microbes. The ATCC has shipped only five vials of lethal anthrax bacteria since 1994. All those vials were sent to U.S. research institutes which were studying the disease common to livestock.

About 30 percent of the 135,000 vials shipped annually go to foreign countries. The rest remain in storage, most remain in secured stainless steel, liquid nitrogen filled vats for decades until requested by researchers.

Additions are made to the repository when scientists discover new specimens which are then cataloged and stored for access by other research biologists. The ATCC charges various fees, from \$20 to \$264 for samples. One recent Nobel Prize winning research scientist relied on the ATCC stockpile to obtain a \$37 specimen from which he invented and patented the process for DNA fingerprinting. That important patent is now valued at millions of dollars.

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**WHO WILL BE YOUR  
REPLACEMENT?  
MAKING THE BEST JOB  
PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS  
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Our firefighters want to be the best firefighters they can be; and the organization wants that same outcome.

Fire Chief Alan Brunacini of the Phoenix Fire Department summed it all up in the five things he list that firefighters want from their supervisors:

- Tell me what you want
- Train me to do it
- Give me the tools to accomplish it
- Get out of my way
- Tell me how I did

The leaders of each fire department should work together to formulate a plan that best suits the professional development of their particular fire department. Working together to figure out how to est serve both the individuals with their career development and the organization's needs will promote the best possible outcome. An outcome where employees truly believe they are part of the team and an outcome where the organization is preparing individuals from within to lead the organization in the future.

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