Performance Management

Setting and Communicating Performance Standards

Before a supervisor can manage the performance of a staff member including facilitating an appraisal, a clear understanding of what constitutes satisfactory performance for that position must be developed. Often supervisors have that understanding but do not articulate it to their employee. The following will guide supervisors through a process that develops a written statement of expected performance for a specific eligible position and strategies for communicating and assessing those standards.

- Position contributes to the achievement of the unit's goals
- Identifying key duties and priorities associated with the position
- Defining key behaviors
- Defining key results and measures
- Writing standards for each key duty
- Performance planning and feedback sessions
- If at any point during the process of setting and communicating performance standards, you may seek assistance from your HR Consultant.

Determining How a Position Contributes to Achievement of the Unit's Goals

In this section, it is assumed that the work unit has goals, and that the supervisor has a clear idea of what they are. A good way of thinking about the unit's goals is to consider how one would justify the continued existence of the unit if someone suggested changing or eliminating it. If your unit doesn’t have clearly articulated goals, you can seek assistance from the Center for Organizational Development & Leadership.
In considering a position's contribution to unit goals, it is important to think in terms of the position and not the incumbent. A superior staff member contributes far more than expected to a specific position compared to a poor performer who contributes little. The contribution statement should be fairly general. Some examples are provided.

> ***Example 1***: Supports research activities of faculty by ensuring work settings meet safety guidelines under federal, state, and university regulations, supporting the goal of being top-tier research university.
> ***Example 2***: Provides computer software support and training to faculty, staff, and students ensuring effective use of university resources and enhanced effectiveness of research, service, administrative, and learning activities.
> In determining what the contributions are by answering the question: What would be likely to happen to the unit if the position were suddenly abolished? What would be most difficult for the unit to accomplish?

It may also be helpful to ask the employee to provide an answer to this question, to ensure there is a relationship between the viewpoints. The supervisor has the responsibility to determine the most appropriate answer. If employees are to perform well, they need to know what general contributions they are expected to make. Next, you can identify key duties and priorities associated with the position.

Key Duties and Priorities Associated with the Position

Once it has been determined how the position supports the goals of the organization, the supervisor can begin developing explicit duty statements for the position. A list of duties may be found in section 2 of the position's Classification and Recruitment Form (CARF). Almost any position can be described in no more than six duty statements, and for some positions, fewer are needed. Some typical duty statements are provided as examples.

> ***Example 1***: Audits usage of all radioactive materials to ensure proper usage and disposition.
> ***Example 2***: Designs, implements and administers local area network that meets departmental needs and interfaces seamlessly with university network.
> ***Example 3***: Tracks grant funding opportunities; keeps appropriate faculty informed of opportunities in their research areas to maximize outside funding of university research activities.
> There are some general guidelines for writing duty statements. Note that in the examples, all the verbs are specific and active (e.g., audits). "Responsible for" is not appropriate in a duty statement. Note also that the verb always has an object (e.g., audits usage of all radioactive materials). Finally, note that the duty statement says why the duty is done, or what is supposed to be accomplished by completion of the duty (e.g., audits usage of all radioactive materials to ensure proper usage and disposition).

There are several helpful approaches to generate duty statements. One way is to think about how a staff member currently spends his time. A second approach is to consider what one would say to a very desirable position applicant who asked how a typical day on the job would be spent. A third approach is to consider what other staff members would have to accomplish if the position in question were abolished. If what the staff member is supposed to do have never been discussed, there is no reason to expect him Second, consider the importance of the duty. These are not necessarily the same. A fundraiser spends relatively little time closing the agreement for a specific donation (compared to the amount of time spent establishing a relationship with a prospective donor, for example) but it is clearly the most important part of the position. Consider the consequences to the unit if a duty is not done or done poorly. The total of the weights assigned should be 100%.

The next stage requires development of results and behaviors to use in setting performance standards relative to duty accomplishment. One or more results and/or behaviors must be developed for each duty. These performance indicators also need to be weighted. The sum of the weights for all results and behaviors associated with a duty should sum to the weight assigned the duty. In some cases, a result or behavior may be associated with more than one duty. The total of weights assigned to results and duties should be 100%.

Defining Key Behaviors

While most supervisors are interested in performance primarily in terms of results, not every result can be easily measured. It is necessary to consider some key behaviors when defining performance and to fill in for unknowable or immeasurable results. These are the behaviors, which if carried out appropriately, are assumed to lead to appropriate results.

For example, in the case noted earlier, a measure of performance relevant to alumni "satisfaction" is desired; but survey data is not available. It could be assumed that if the staff member takes some specified set of actions (behaves in a certain way) that satisfied alumni would result. Such behaviors might include being polite to alumni who call in with complaints and doing whatever it takes to get an answer to their questions or complaints within some specified time. Keeping records of complaints and producing meaningful analyses of the dynamics of complaints might also be considered.

There are a number of ways of developing these critical behaviors. They rely on the supervisor's experience and common sense. The first approach is to consider what incumbents of the position have done that has made them effective in their position. *What is it about what they did that made them effective? How does what they did relate to the results listed? To which duty(s) are the behaviors related?* If staff do things that make them ineffective, go through the same process. Ineffective behaviors may give clues to things that effective performers avoid, or they may be reversed to describe things that effective performers do. An alternate approach is to focus on the "ideal" performer in the position. *How would such a performer be described? What would one see her do that indicated she is a good performer?*
Note the stress on "do" in the paragraph above. Many supervisors tend to think of traits or competencies when they talk about effective or ineffective employees. The effective performer is creative, shows initiative, is a hard worker, demonstrates leadership, etc., while the ineffective performer is lazy, dishonest, unimaginative, and so forth. While such adjectives are useful in summarizing total performance, they are not very helpful as measures or performance on specific duties. It is crucial to state behaviors or behavioral sequences in "do" terms. If it can't be filmed, it is probably not a behavior. It would be hard to photograph "creative", but it would be possible to photograph a fundraiser finding new potential donors for Rutgers programs by getting involved with groups who have not traditionally been contributors and developing appeals that resonate with these groups.

Some examples of behaviors related to staff positions found at Rutgers include:

- *Informs other systems programmers of changes in the Windows platform so that they can avoid network problems.*
- *Explains how to use the Rutgers website to prospective and current students so that a greater proportion of these students are able to complete transactions on their own.*
- *Goes to professional society meetings and participates by holding office, presenting papers.*

Defining Key Results

This is a critical stage in the process. There is a tendency on the part of many supervisors to think of easily measured results and then define performance in terms of those results. In fact, many of the most important results are difficult or impossible to measure. If performance management is to work, it is essential that it concentrate on relevant performance results, not merely those that are easily measured.

There are two kinds of results. The first kind occurs as the direct outcome of duty completion. The second kind is referred to in the system as "symptoms." These are measures which may be indicative of performance on a duty, but which are not direct outcomes of the duty. For example, a supervisor experiences high turnover of direct reports because they are promoted into other Rutgers positions. This can be taken as a sign of high performance in the managerial responsibility of "Training and Development of Assigned Staff. "Particular care must be taken when choosing results to be used as symptoms to make sure that the measure chosen really is a symptom of desired performance on a duty and not merely some measure that is easy to get.

To develop a list of key results, refer to the list of key duties. Focus on how it is known a critical duty has been completed. Are there deliverables? If so, what are they? Could an incumbent manipulate the result and still do a poor position on the duty? An analyst, for example, might produce any number of reports, but they may be worthless as an input to decisions. Is the incumbent solely responsible for the result? Much work in Rutgers is based on team or group effort, and a group member might perform at very high levels but be pulled down by other members of the group. Likewise, a team member may disguise poor performance by hiding behind the efforts of the group. Finally, external forces beyond the control of the employee may distort many results.

How will the result be measured? Even if a result is an appropriate measure of performance, it may be difficult to get any concrete measure of it. If a supervisor has a staff member in charge of alumni relations, and the result wanted is "satisfied" or "happy" alumni, getting a measure of "satisfied" or "happy" will be difficult. Surveys of alumni satisfaction could provide measures, and it is possible that a measure of that aspect of performance is important enough for the supervisor to do so.

Results associated with an employee's performance generally have two characteristics. The first is quantity (quality is assumed), and the second is time. Any specification of results desired should include both. A standard result for most duties will be framed in terms of the performance cycle. That is, if performance is being planned for the next year, the result specified will be for the year. Some results may have shorter time specifications.

To summarize, when drawing up the list of results relevant to the position:

- Consider the *duty list* developed for the position.
  For each duty try to think of one or two major results which really matter. It should be difficult for the incumbent to achieve the result as defined and measured and still not complete the duty satisfactorily.
- Consider *duty priorities* as results are developed.
  There should probably be no more than 8 to 10 results listed for any position. Many positions have no readily discernable results or outcomes. In these cases, behaviors can substitute for results.
- Ensure reliable measures of each result can be attained that would be difficult for the staff member (or anyone else) to distort. Consider the time framework relevant to the result. Now you are ready to write performance standards for the position.

Writing Standards for Each Key Duty

The final stage in preparing for the planning of performance is to articulate the standards for each of the results or behaviors listed. The Rutgers performance management system has two ratings: Meets Standards and Does Not Meet Standards. Drafting your standards should center on these two ratings.

Meets Standards

When setting performance standards, whether for results or behaviors, it is best to start with midlevel performance, when the performance "meets standards." The university has defined this level as encompassing a range of performance from satisfactorily meeting position expectations to occasionally exceeding position expectations. It is felt that almost all staff perform their jobs efficiently and with professionalism, so it is expected that most will be rated in this category.

What level of result or behavior will meet standards?

It is the level expected of any employee who is fully position knowledgeable and makes a satisfactory effort to perform. To set a behavioral standard for "meets standards," decide what percentage of the time the appropriate behavior should be expected of an employee who is position knowledgeable and makes a satisfactory effort to perform. This percentage should be fairly high. It might be reasonable to expect any sequence 95% of the time from a "meets standards" performer. This is because employees generally have more control over their behavior than they do over results.

Does Not Meet Standards

To set standards for performance which "does not meet standards," think of a performance level that if observed would make the supervisor want to call it to the attention of the direct report, and would make one question the employee's skill or effort. This is a level of performance at which improvement will be required if the employee is to be retained.

Setting Standards

There are several points to consider when developing standards. Results standards have several aspects as indicated below.

- Quantity: For example "200 new qualified student applications processed per week and the other is time (e.g., "by June 22").
- Time/speed: For example, "…complete each Friday by 5:00 p.m." or "Responds to all phone calls in 24 hours."
- Cost: For example, "...ensures publication costs do not exceed 2% each fiscal year"
- Quality" For example, "Completes correspondence on time with no errors."
- Judgment of others: For example, "Workshop evaluations have an average composite rating of 3.5 on a 5 point scale."

As stated previously, developing behavioral standards can be difficult. Behavioral standards are typically set very high, as they tend to be the area of performance that supervisor focus on most frequently. Behaviors such as excessive tardiness, lack of cooperation with coworkers, and failure to follow designated procedures often lead to employee discipline. To "meet standards" on a behavioral standard might require that appropriate behavior be exhibited 95% of the time. Clarify not only what the behavior is, but also the frequency if that behavior is being performed. Another consideration in settings standards I consistency across the department. If several directors or supervisors in a unit have staff members with similar positions reporting to them, they should discuss standards among themselves and try to reach consensus on what appropriate standards should be. This should not be attempted the first year. It is more important that standards are made explicit first, and then similarity can be sought.

A final note on setting performance standards. Setting standards is a supervisor's duty and responsibility; it is not the function of the employee. Ensure you are evaluating the employee's performance based upon standards set by you. It is important to do a little "reality checking" before implementing standards. If expectations are excessively high, employees will recognize that they are unattainable and will not even attempt to meet them. If they are too low, one is not likely to get the best from staff members, and unit performance will suffer.

Performance Planning and Appraisal Sessions

Performance planning is critical to implementing a performance management system. Every supervisor should conduct a performance planning session with each eligible staff member. During this meeting, the supervisor should describe what the direct report is to achieve during the next performance cycle. The supervisor must be able to articulate:

- The general function of the position
- The key duties associated with the position
- The relative importance of each duty to the achievement of the department's goals
- The indicators the supervisor will use (either results or behaviors) to judge the employee's performance on each duty
- The standards to be used to determine the level of performance achieved by the staff member on each result or behavior

The supervisor can then communicate to the employee what is expected in terms of performance and how that performance will be appraised at the end of the performance cycle.

Performance Planning Meetings

Performance planning meetings are any scheduled meetings where you communicate to your employee you want to discuss his performance and your expectations for fulfilling required duties. Performance planning meetings can be held at any time including during the new hire orientation process, mid-year, or after the formal appraisal process for eligible employees in preparation for the next year's goal setting. As you begin the meeting, you want to encourage and model two-way communication by encouraging the employee to ask questions and be an active participant in the planning process.

To begin the meeting, start by reviewing the key duties and behaviors for the position and make sure the employee understands the priorities. Discuss performance standards for each duty and make sure that the employee knows what it takes to meet expectations. How do you do that? You can ask the staff member to rephrase the expectations in his own words or to give an example of effective or poor performance for that key duty. Then, together you can determine how to best measure performance for each duty or behavior. Keep in mind that you can discuss standards and measures, but as a manger, it is your responsibility and obligation to ensure that the standards and measures are appropriate for the position.

In most cases, the performance-planning meeting will go well, and your employee will have a clear roadmap for fulfilling her responsibilities. However, at times there may be resistance to the standards set. If there is resistance to standards, explain why you feel the standards are appropriate. Ask the employee if there are any obstacles preventing her from reaching her performance goals. By encouraging open dialogue, you can ascertain what the problem is and how to resolve it. From there, discuss the commitment you will make in terms of resources, time and direct assistance to help the employee to improve performance, including participation in professional development programs.

Performance Appraisal Meetings

Performance appraisal meetings are held for eligible employee according to the official university schedule. Like the performance planning meeting, you should model and encourage open communication.

You should provide information and relevant timelines to all eligible employees well in advance. Once you are informed of the Pay-for-Performance or Staff Compensation Schedule for the current year and or your unit, share that information with the staff. Key dates might include completion of self-appraisal, scheduled appraisal sessions, and motivation of ratings.

To prepare for the appraisals meeting, ensure it is held in a private area with minimal distractions. If your office does not afford the privacy necessary, try to secure a vacant office or meeting room. Begin the meeting by summarizing the employee's overall performance level. Do not discuss your overall recommendation or increase unless you have secured approval from your Vice President or Chancellor. If the employee has completed a self-appraisal, ask the employee to share this with you. From there, discuss the difference between your appraisal and the employee's self-appraisal. Discuss the performance levels for each key duty, asking the employee about her feelings about your assessment. Be sure to cite specific examples to explain your ratings and discuss the positive and/or negative consequences of the level of performance the employee has achieved. Some consequences may include recognition, career enhancement, or an opportunity to be considered for other challenging duties. Finally, discuss developmental opportunities with the employee and begin the performance planning process for the next appraisal period.

In most cases, the appraisal meeting will go well, however at times the meeting may not go as planned. Difficult appraisal meetings do occur, and the following strategies scan help you manage the situation tactfully and with carte. Focus on gaining acceptance by the employee and developing joint solutions for a performance plan. To do so, review those areas where there are disagreements and try to reach a common ground of understanding. It is not uncommon for the employee to misunderstand the standards for performance. For example, and staff member who is responsible for conducting workshops may say, "I did exceptionally well in this duty. I conducted thirty workshops last semester." However, you then remind the employee that the standards for the duty were not the quantity of workshops, but the quality. You then let him know that some sessions were cancelled due to poor advertising and the evaluations from students were inconsistent in rating their satisfaction. From there you can obtain agreement on the problem areas and identify ways to improve performance. Agree on a set of actions and schedule follow up dates to review progress.

After the appraisal meeting, be sure to support the employee's performance improvement. This can be done by providing necessary information and resources, scheduling on-site training, and allowing for participation in professional development. Additionally, it is important that you look for opportunities to observe the employee's performance and behaviors. Ideally, you will use coaching techniques. There are several good programs available through Rutgers free access for all employees on LinkedIn Learning.

Pitfalls to Avoid When Appraising an Employee

- Providing honest, thoughtful and objective performance appraisal can be among the most difficult assignments for any manager or supervisor. However, the importance of performance management in the overall success of an organization cannot be overstated. Avoid these pitfalls when appraising your employees:
- Don't focus on one specific incident – review the entire period which the appraisal covers
- Don't go solely by memory – base the review on accurate and factual data
- Avoid the "halo" and "horns" effects. Just because the employee performs less than satisfactorily in one area does not make his or her overall performance is less than satisfactory. The same goes for satisfactory performance
- Length of service or job grade does not necessarily mean better performance. Look carefully at the individual's performance within that job
- Avoid bias about an employee based on your personal feelings for that individual
- Don't base current performance on past performance. Look at the current period being reviewed
- Don't overrate a poor performer as a motivational tool
- Not all individuals are the same. Analyze each employee carefully; establish performance ranking
- Don't rush through the appraisal. Take time to record accurate information which truly reflects the individual's performance
- Don't be afraid to provide truthful information

A Step-by-Step Action Plan for Managers and Supervisors

1. **Choose Objectives** - Analyze job duties and responsibilities, required outcomes and results; choose and define appraisal criteria;
2. **Communicate expectations** - Set performance expectations / targets and communicate to employee; allow for participation;
3. **Plan** - Assist employee in determining and implementing effective strategies, processes to perform tasks; explore options and limitations regarding selection of methods; obtain required resources;
4. **Monitor, Assist, and Control** - Continually monitor performance, providing ongoing feedback and assistance in the forms of problem solving, coaching, counseling, and developing; remove roadblocks to successful performance; take corrective action as required;
5. **Appraise** - Observe, document, recall, and evaluate performance against expectations and standards; complete appraisal forms; back up evaluation with concrete examples and data;
6. **Feedback** - Review evaluation with employee in a planned feedback session; be specific and explicit; listen carefully; use a problem solving approach; cover strengths, contributions, and areas of improvement; create an action plan to address improved performance and/or develop performance capability;
7. **Personnel Decisions** - Make personnel decisions (e.g., pay increase, promotion, incentives, transfers, etc.);
8. **Develop** - Implement developmental action plans, where appropriate.

Performance Appraisal Planning Checklist

[ ] Be prepared – know the objectives and goals of the meeting.

[ ] Time and Place – choose a quiet, private spot with as few interruptions as possible.

[ ] Conducting the appraisal:

- Create a positive environment and help the employee feel at ease
- Give balanced feedback, both positive and negative, but start with the positive
- Focus on the job, not the person
- Ask questions and allow the employee to provide feedback
- When discussing areas for improvement, discuss methods and objectives for improving
- Discuss possibilities for advancement, the employee's aspirations and professional development necessary to be a candidate for such future positions.

[ ] Conclusion:

- Summarize and review the important points of the discussion
- Restate the action steps that have been recommended and provide a timeframe for completion
- Make sure the employee reviews the appraisal and provides comments
- Have employee sign it to acknowledge that he or she has read it (does not signify agreement with the content)

[ ] Follow-up:

- Follow up with the employee to see how plans are proceeding within the given timeframes
- Offer the employee assistance in achieving objectives and encourage discussion of successes and obstacles.