

Making Performance Management Work

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A good Performance Management System should be the backbone of your company's Personnel Development process. Yet, for so many of us, the Performance Appraisals that we receive can have a negative impact on our personal and professional growth.

And that is a problem....

Having received a significant number of Performance Appraisals in our careers, we can count on one hand those that provided any real help. We both received numerous reviews that were clear indications that the boss did not consider the appraisal process important.

As an example, one year Dave received a Performance Appraisal that had every category (about 18 of them) marked with the highest possible marks. However, there was not a word written on the rest of the review. He later discovered that the Admin Assistant of the Vice President had written the review.

On another occasion Dave was asked to provide input for his review. That is not an unusual request and he complied by providing insights on key objectives and skills. His boss called him to explain that his input was incomplete. He quickly realized that he was not "providing input" but rather was writing the review himself! As an act of rebellion, Dave rewrote the review giving himself the top mark in every category and justified the ratings in glowing, verbose language. To prove his point (that no one really read or cared about the review) he left several sentences horribly incomplete, and even included a "joke" in one category. The review was later presented for him to sign, approved by his boss and his boss's boss, the joke still intact, and the sentences still incomplete.

These are just a couple of examples, and it would not be hard for us to go on.

But why are Performance Appraisals so distasteful?

Simply put, our Performance Appraisal systems are trying to serve too many masters. No system can be a success when it is trying to please and serve everyone. As it is today, Performance Appraisals are not only used for employee development, but also for salary increases, bonuses, promotion opportunities, to avoid lawsuits and so on.....

The simple truth is that certain employees have a higher ceiling than others. They have more talents, skills, and potential and we owe it to them to help them develop their talents. The goal of Performance Management should be to identify those areas of development for the individual, along with a Development Plan. This information is often buried today in the "Skills" portion of a Performance Appraisal.

To determine merit increases, bonuses, etc. we should be looking at the individual's contribution to the organization, their success against the goals and objectives, and their ability to complete their jobs as designed.

Until we learn to separate skill and personal development from completion of objectives, we will only serve to confuse our employees and denigrate the process of Personnel Development.

What specifically is wrong with Performance Appraisals today?

- Performance Appraisals for most companies are completed for all employees within the same 2 or 3- week timeframe. This was intended to allow managers to do honest and fair assessments of their employees by allowing them to compare employee performance at exactly the same moment for every employee. In reality, it forces the manager to stack rank their employees and then rush through the Performance Appraisal process to justify those rankings.
- Since most appraisals are completed in the same timeframe, the reviewer often either gets too tired to provide useful feedback, or gets writers block. Reviews end up looking like cookie cutter documents with similar wording, strengths, and weaknesses. It's difficult to provide honest, detailed feedback when you are writing your 10th Performance Appraisal of the week.
- There is a myth of objectivity that surrounds reviews. It's a myth because so many of the categories on reviews are clearly subjective. By combining Objective categories (performance) with Subjective categories (skills and talent development) we weaken the impact of both how a person performed in their current job (Objective) and how they can be developed to perform at higher levels in the future (Subjective).
- Last, but certainly not least, is the employee's perception. Survey after survey indicates that 80% of employees believe that their performance is above average. When we tie Performance Appraisals into salary increases and bonuses instead of development, we do not strengthen employee performance, instead we put employee on the defensive as they compare themselves to their peers.

What is the answer?

We need to find a way to reward our employees financially for their performance. And we need a separate mechanism to define how to develop our employees to the best of their abilities based on their personal potential. In other words, pay them for their performance and develop them for their potential.

An engaged and energized workforce leads to higher productivity, reduced costs, improved customer service, and increased profitability. Employee engagement happens when your Corporate Culture, Leadership Style, and Employee Expectations are in synch.

The Fusion Program from ECI Learning Systems is designed to align these 3 concepts in your organization – engaging your employees and creating positive energy that will propel your company to new heights.

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