

THINGS TO AVOID WHEN CONDUCTING PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

Avoid relying solely on memory: Do not rely solely on your memory of the last 12 months. Gather additional information to help you give a fair and accurate rating. A good starting point is the employee's job description. By reviewing the job description, you ensure that you are familiar with what your employee is responsible for on a day-to-day basis. In addition, you should review the job description with the employee so both of you are starting with the same expectations of what the employee is responsible for.

Review any notes or records you have kept during the year regarding the employee, including training records, disciplinary actions, and letters of commendation. Also talk to others that this employee interacts with during the course of their job duties. Get feedback from other departments, citizens, peers, and subordinates.

Avoid letting friendship or dislike skew the evaluation: The employee deserves honest feedback on their performance. Base the evaluation strictly on observed behaviors and the employee's ability and job knowledge. Avoid judging personal characteristics. You cannot prove the employee is not trying, you can only prove he/she is not succeeding. You cannot change the employee's bad attitude, but you can establish goals to improve deficiencies.

Avoid cutting and pasting evaluations from one year to the next: As a supervisor, it is your responsibility to provide an accurate and unique evaluation each year. By using a similar evaluation each year, you are doing that employee a disservice by not helping them understand areas they can improve and grow. This also puts the City at risk as issues may not be addressed in the evaluation that may grow to a larger problem in the upcoming year.

Avoid using labels rather than behaviors: Including labels without examples provides little guidance to the employee about where he needs to improve. Claiming an employee has a bad attitude does not say much. Saying the employee does not accept responsibility for his errors, slams doors, and walks out of meetings abruptly says it all.

Avoid criticizing intent and focus on results: Stay away from attacking an employee's intent, e.g., "You didn't try." "You don't care." "You weren't applying yourself." Intent is largely irrelevant; you cannot prove it. And the employee may take it as a personal attack. Employees who feel attacked, attack back. Focus on the employee's results, not his intent.

Avoid referencing protected absences: Be careful about referring to protected leaves (for example, family or medical leave under the Family & Medical Leave Act) on the evaluation. It could be problematic to say: "Upon returning from FMLA, the employee was absent six days in 12 weeks without providing adequate notice." Was the problem the lack of notice or that the lack of notice followed the employee's exercise of her right to take protected leave? An appropriate comment is "Your absenteeism is excessive. Of course, we are not counting the four weeks when you were off in July covered by FMLA. Rather, we are considering only the following absences ..."

Avoid common rater errors: When actually completing the performance evaluation form beware of the following errors:

Halo or Horn effect. Rating an employee high, or low, on all areas because he is really strong or really weak in one or two areas. Be sure to rate each criterion separately.

Timing Issues. An annual evaluation should reflect only the year evaluated. But sometimes employers bring up baggage from past years. Managers should raise prior deficiencies only to the extent they remain, in which event they really are current deficiencies. Conversely, if a deficiency was noted in the prior year and the employee has corrected it, that can and should be noted.

Another timing mistake is focusing too heavily on the employee's performance during recent months. Remember you are evaluating a full year of performance. Too much emphasis on recent events encourages employees to slack off until evaluation time. While you should focus on the full 12 months, you can still note any differences in performance at different periods of time during the year.

Over-emphasis on isolated events/characteristics. Do not put undue weight on a single successful or failed project the employee had during the year. Try to keep those isolated incidents in perspective.

Leniency. Reasons for leniency include not wanting to anger the employee, worrying the employee's low rating will reflect on the supervisor, the supervisor and the employee are friends, or the employee has been with the city longer than the supervisor. None of these reasons remove the supervisor's responsibility to give accurate and objective evaluations.

Evaluation of potential worth. This happens a lot with new employees. You see their future potential and want to encourage them by giving higher ratings. However, you should focus on evaluating their current actual job performance. Your honest evaluation will lay the groundwork for them to improve the skills they need to achieve their potential worth.

Central tendency. This occurs when a supervisor avoids very high or very low ratings. These evaluations have very little value because everyone is rated about the same with no regard for output and quality of work.

Self-comparison. Some supervisors will rate employees lower because they do not complete the job the same way the supervisor would do it. The supervisor should rate the final outcome and whether the employee was successful in completing the assigned responsibilities.

No-complaint bias. This is the “no news is good news” approach. The supervisor who takes this approach may not be getting the full picture. Most supervisors are too busy dealing with their responsibilities to monitor their employees on a daily basis. An important source of information for supervisors can be other departments, citizens, peers and subordinates.