

SELECTING, ONBOARDING, AND DEVELOPING NEW EMPLOYEES

Cindy Taylor, Sherri Doshier, and Jimmy Powell

It is a fine thing to have ability, but to discover
ability in others is the true test.

Elbert Hubbard, writer, publisher, and artist

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SNAPSHOT

Selecting and developing new employees is an important supervisory skill. This chapter provides guidance on how to carry out that role successfully. Chapter objectives are to

- Increase understanding of the recruitment process from preparing a job description to selecting the best candidate
- Raise awareness of the legal requirements of recruitment
- Introduce key components of connecting with and orienting new employees
- Provide guidance on preparing an employee development program.

The chapter will help you answer these questions:

- What are your responsibilities in selecting employees?
- How do you conduct a successful interview?
- What steps can you take to assure that new employees get off to a good start?
- What is your role in employee development?

One of your most important roles as a supervisor is to select and develop employees assigned to your unit. You are more likely to succeed in getting work done with and through other people if you select employees carefully, let them know what is expected of them when they start working, go through an appropriate onboarding process with them, and keep them up-to-date through job-related training and continuous feedback. Opportunities for individual development are a key retention factor for employees.

Selecting employees

Selecting the right employee for a position requires a partnership between you and the human resources (HR) department. In most jurisdictions, the HR department is responsible for advertising positions and screening applicants. Your job as a supervisor is to furnish a current and accurate description for each job you are trying to

Authors Cindy Taylor, Sherri Doshier, and Jimmy Powell appreciatively recognize the contribution of Stephen E. Condrey and Carl McCoy, who wrote the version of this chapter included in the previous edition.



fill, especially if the job has changed recently. A complete and legally compliant job description includes

- Specific duties and responsibilities
- Physical requirements, if any
- *Required* knowledge, skills, and abilities
- *Desirable* knowledge, skills, and abilities.

When developing a new or updated job description, it is helpful to have another employee who is doing or has done the same job review the description for accuracy. Once you have done this review, you are ready to work with your HR department to determine which requirements should be highlighted in the advertisement.

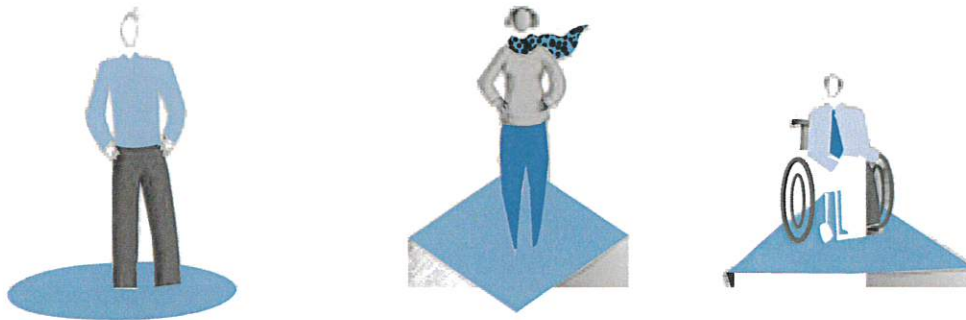
In addition to listing qualifications for the position, the advertisement should list any testing requirements. Assessment centers and performance examinations that allow candidates to demonstrate their skills in work-related situations are often used to rank candidates among a large pool of applicants. A performance examination can be especially helpful if the position requires the operation of equipment or machines or use of specific software. In order to comply with personnel and labor laws, it is essential to include any required exams in your advertisement and to administer the same test to all applicants. Your HR department can develop an assessment center if you decide to use one as part of the selection process.

Preparing to conduct a job interview

A successful job interview will provide the information you need to select the right person for the job. In addition, it will help the applicant learn more about the organization or unit in which the job is located and about you as a potential supervisor. If the interview is the candidate's first contact with you and the organization, you will want to make a good first impression.

Preparing to conduct a successful interview includes these steps:

- Reviewing the job description and the advertisement to revisit the job requirements as they were presented to potential candidates
- Reviewing the candidate's application and resume to become familiar with previous work experience and job-related skills



- Preparing questions you will use to conduct the interview
- Thinking about the type of person that will be an asset to your team
- Assembling the materials you will need to conduct the interview including the job description, the candidate's application and resume, your questions, and a pad for taking notes during the discussion.

With good preparation, you increase the chance of hiring and retaining the right person for the job.

You may want to consider using a panel to interview applicants. In this approach, you select three to five current employees who are familiar with the position to conduct the interview with you. The panel usually is composed of a subject matter expert from the work unit, an HR official, and representatives from other departments or divisions who typically work closely with the person in the position for which you are interviewing. An effort should be made to ensure that the panel reflects the organization's diversity, including gender, age, and racial diversity.

Behavioral interviewing

Behavioral interviewing is a technique that adds more depth to the information you gather about job candidates by examining past behavior in situations similar to what they might encounter in this job. Past behavior is a good predictor of performance in a new job. The first step is to develop a good set of job-related questions for yourself such as:

- What skills will the employee need right away?
- What skills are *required* for the job versus what are *desirable*?
- What skills can the employee learn on the job?
- What situations/examples will demonstrate the knowledge and skills required?
- What topics do you want to discuss and in what order?

You should develop interview questions based on the essential job functions and the knowledge and skills required to perform them. Use questions that will clarify or expand on the information that has been provided in the person’s job application and resume.

Position	Essential job function	Required knowledge/skills	Interview question
Customer service representative	Responds to customer inquiries	Skill in oral and written communication	Describe a time when you had to deal with an especially unhappy customer.
Social worker	Interviews prospective foster parents	Skill in establishing relationships	Tell me how you have established rapport with customers.
Deputy sheriff	Monitors activity in court buildings	Skill in responding calmly and quickly in a crisis	Describe a time when you had to handle an emergency and how you dealt with that situation.
Building inspector	Inspects structures for code compliance	Knowledge of building codes	Tell me about a situation in which you applied a particularly complex or vague portion of the code.

SAMPLE INTERVIEW QUESTIONS

- How did you learn about this organization?
- What professional accomplishments are you most proud of and why?
- What is your top professional goal for the next three to five years?
- Describe a time when you didn't accomplish a goal. What action did you take?
- Describe a significant report, policy, or presentation you have developed.
- Give an example of how you solved a problem in a previous position with a creative approach.
- Describe a time when you led a group or a team.
- Describe your experience in working with customers from various cultural backgrounds. What approaches have you used to address their diverse needs?
- Describe an ethical dilemma you have faced in the workplace. What was your role in the resolution? What, if anything, would you do differently if faced with the same issue again?
- Describe a difficult problem that you faced in a previous position. How did you resolve it?



Keeping it legal

Federal law prohibits employers from disqualifying a candidate because of race, sex, age, religion, nationality, disability, or other personal characteristics that have nothing to do with the person's ability to do the job. In addition, you are not permitted to ask prospective employees questions about their marital status, their children, what neighborhood they come from, or what church they attend. Questions that may seem harmless—such as “You have a very interesting last name. What country is it from?” or “How long have you been married?”—are considered discriminatory because they focus on aspects of an applicant's life that are unrelated to the ability to perform a job.

You should also avoid making judgments about what a person may or may not be able to do based on appearances. For example, assuming that a slightly built candidate may not be able to handle the

MAKE THE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE JOB, NOT THE PERSON

Illegal

Do you have a babysitter for your children?

Does your religion prevent you from working weekends or holidays?

Are you a citizen?

Do you have any physical handicaps?

Legal

Are you available to work on Saturday?

Here is our work schedule. Are you available to work during the scheduled times for this position?

After employment can you submit verification of your legal right to work in the United States? (Note: this must be asked of all candidates.)

Here are the job duties. Are you able to fully perform them?

physical requirements of a job or that an older candidate will not be familiar with technology is illegal and may interfere with choosing the best candidate for the job. If you examine your personal biases in advance, you can stop yourself from making an unfair—and perhaps illegal—employment decision.


Once you have made your selection, you must be able to demonstrate to others that your decision was based only on an applicant's ability to perform the essential job functions better than other candidates you interviewed.

Your organization's HR department, equal employment opportunity office, or legal department can provide guidance about screening criteria and appropriate questions to ask during the job interview. It's better to check with the experts who keep up with the legal aspects of HR management than to take a chance and risk a lawsuit. An effective supervisor follows legal guidelines, exercises good judgment, and is always fair and consistent when interviewing job candidates.

Conducting the interview

Your interview will be more successful if you

- Conduct it in a comfortable and private work space
- Put the applicant (and yourself) at ease

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- Phrase questions to encourage conversation and to get the information you need
 - Listen carefully
 - Take notes during the interview, and write down your observations promptly afterward.

You and the applicant will learn more about each other if both of you are comfortable and relaxed. Begin by introducing yourself. Use the candidate's name right away, and continue to use it during the conversation. If possible there should be no physical barriers, such as a desk or table, between you and the applicant. Make sure you have adequate space away from noise and distractions.


Following your introductions, briefly review the job description and provide additional information about the position. Give a realistic description of the position including environmental factors, physical demands, workload, and hours of operation or shifts. It is important to state these factors clearly from the beginning of the interview, not only to give the applicant a clear picture of what to expect but also to help you begin to determine how well the individual may fit with your organization.

Avoid yes-or-no questions such as "Have you ever done this kind of work before?" "Do you think you can do this job?" or "Is customer service important?" Instead, ask open-ended questions such as these:

- What skills do you have that make you the right person for this job?
- How would you handle an agitated taxpayer who comes into your office because his garbage hasn't been collected for two weeks?

Successful interviewing requires you to focus closely on the conversation so you hear everything that is said and how it is said. In other words, you must truly listen. Steps you can take to maximize successful listening during the interview include

- Ensuring that there are no interruptions from visitors, the telephone, or mobile devices
- Focusing on what the applicant is saying from start to finish
- Waiting until the applicant is finished before thinking about your response or your next questions

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- Giving the applicant time to gather his or her thoughts in response to your questions even if that means pauses in the flow of the conversation
 - Being a careful and consistent listener throughout the interview.

Although you must ask each applicant the same initial interview questions, you may need to use follow-up questions to get additional information. The follow-up questions will differ depending on the answers the applicant provides. The key to a successful interview is asking sufficient and legal follow-up questions. Statements such as “Tell me more about that” or questions such as “Can you explain what your role was in that situation?” will help you to get important details about the applicant’s experience. After you finish your questions, give the applicant an opportunity to ask you questions so that he or she has a clear understanding of what is expected. In addition, you can gather more information about your candidates by the questions they ask.

At the conclusion of the interview, tell the applicant what will happen next in the process. When do you anticipate making a decision? Will there be a second interview? Is a background investigation, drug test, or any physical examination required before a final offer is made? Make sure you are clear on what your organizational policies require.

Finally, write down your notes about the applicant as soon as the interview is over, while the conversation is still clear in your mind. Avoid recording any assumptions about the applicant or interpretations of what you think the applicant’s answers or body language implied; instead, record facts about what the applicant said or didn’t say, and what body language was visible. For example, you could write down, “made very little eye contact” but not, “seemed shifty” or “untrustworthy.” Record your observations on a standard form (which will usually be provided by your HR department). Recording information about the same aspects of each interview will help you make fair comparisons and ensure equitable interviews.

Employee onboarding

Employee onboarding is a process designed to welcome, educate, and connect new employees to the organization and their specific work unit. A new employee who is well connected to the organization from the start—including rules and procedures,



processes, relationships, responsibilities, roles, development opportunities, and more—is much more likely to become a productive employee.

The three primary components of an effective employee onboarding program are

- Discussing job expectations
- Engaging new employees
- Promoting new employee retention.

While your HR department will usually provide new employees a general orientation to the organization, it's important that you provide a customized introduction to your department and division.

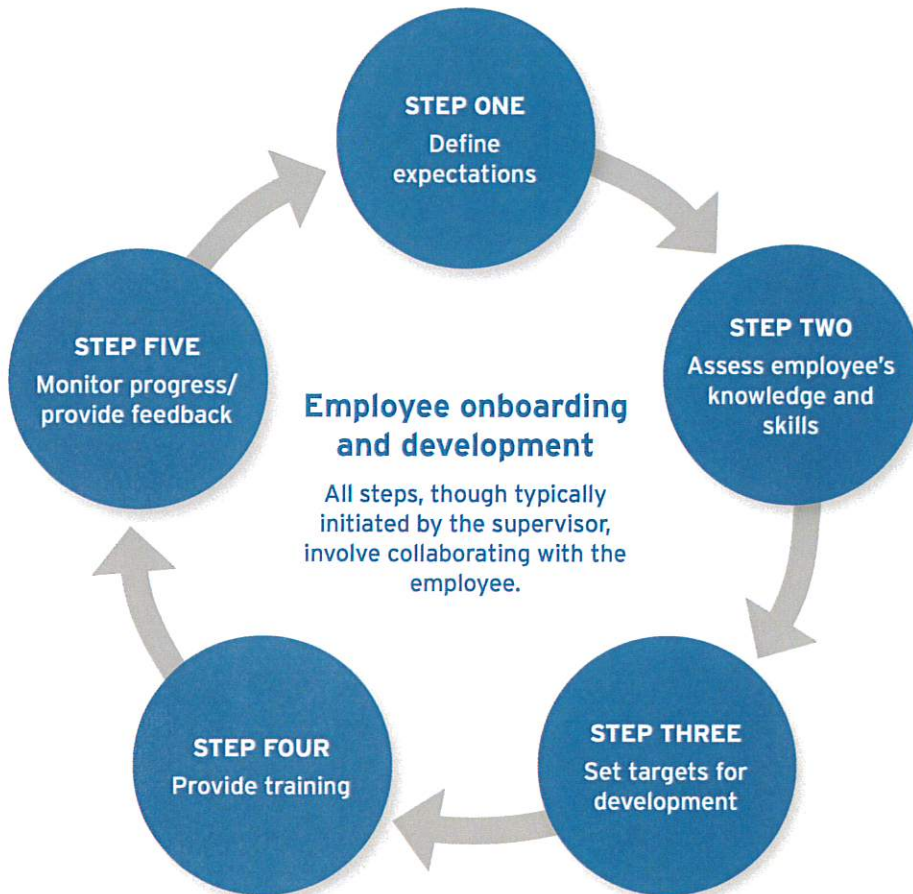
Discussing job expectations

Early in the onboarding period, two points should be made clear: what you expect of the new employee, and what he or she expects from you. Sometimes new employees quit or are terminated because they consistently fail to meet the expectations of the supervisor. Making your expectations clear to the new employee on the first day and making sure the employee understands them will minimize misunderstandings, confusion, and disappointment.

Misunderstandings also arise if employees don't have the opportunity to discuss their expectations. Therefore, it is good practice for both you and the new employee to agree on the job expectations together. In addition, providing ongoing, constructive feedback is essential in reinforcing your expectations.

At this stage, you should also discuss the parameters of the probationary period, which provides a fixed time period to closely monitor and evaluate mutually agreed-upon job expectations.

Since priorities and expectations change, you and your new employees should continue to keep each other informed about what each expects from the other, particularly during the early months of the working relationship.

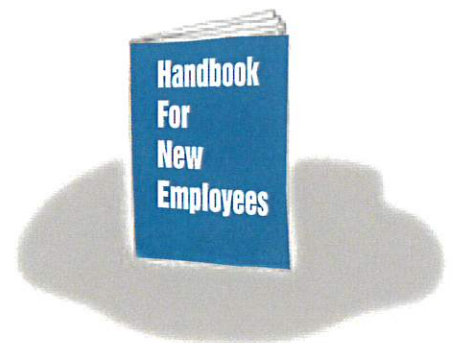


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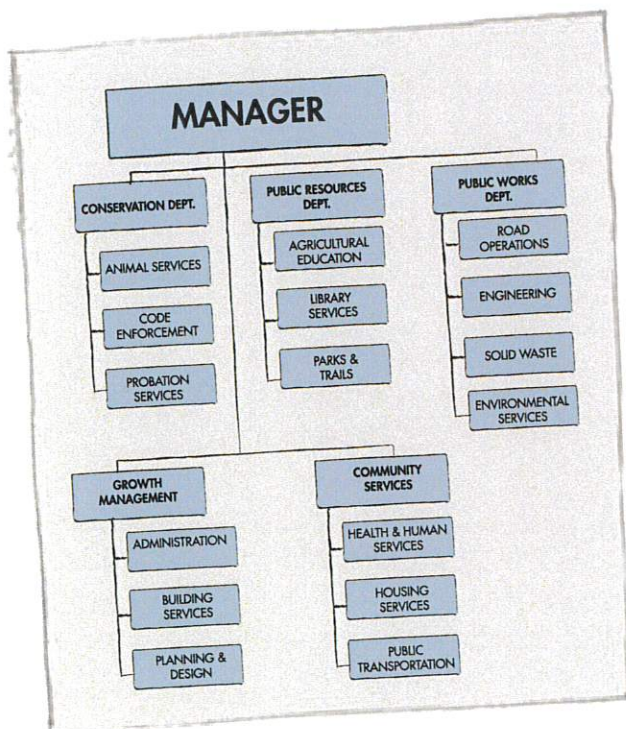
Engaging new employees

New employees need to know where tools and resources are, how work gets done, and who does what. When onboarding new employees, the following steps will help get them off to a good start:

- Introduce new employees to everyone they will come into contact with during the first week.




- Give new employees a tour of the work area including offices, unit work areas, supply and equipment storage areas, restrooms, drinking fountains, break areas, and places to clean up if appropriate.
- Explain the organization's ethical standards and rules and regulations including safety, smoking, parking, transportation, work hours, telecommuting, appropriate attire, drug- and alcohol-use policies, absences, work breaks, lunch hours, and pay days.
- If your local government publishes one, give new employees an employee handbook or a link to an online version. Set aside some time during the first week to explain important sections and to answer questions.
- Explain the steps employees must follow to clarify misunderstandings or get action on complaints.



- Review the organization's internal communication system including Internet, intranet, e-mail, telephone, and social media access and use.
- Explain how supplies and equipment should be used, including the telephone and voice mail system, computers, copying and fax machines, heavy equipment or machinery, and tools of the trade.
- Review any required electronic or paper reports and forms.
- Discuss how each employee's job fits in with the work of the department and of the local government's goals and objectives, perhaps using an organization chart to highlight roles and connections. Emphasize that every job contributes in some way to service delivery and is an essential part of the organization.

You can enhance the onboarding experience by assigning one or two seasoned employees to mentor each new employee for the first few weeks. Be sure that new employees understand that these experienced employees



have been assigned to help them get connected to the organization and to answer their questions. It is also important for you to check with the mentors periodically to see how things are going.

Promoting employee retention

The first three to six months are tough for new employees. Customers, co-workers, the work environment, and job responsibilities are new and strange, and almost everything is being done for the first time. Most new employees have moments when they wonder, “Can I really do this job?” or “Did I make the right choice?”

A check-in system can be used to help new employees get adjusted to their new work environment. This means setting aside time regularly for the new employee to ask questions and for you to provide feedback on what’s going well and what needs improvement. Recognizing positive behaviors and early accomplishments regularly during the first few weeks will help the new employee settle into the job and feel more confident and comfortable. After that, you can schedule monthly reviews of the new employee’s work for at least the first six months. Regular support keeps employee morale high, reassures newcomers that they are doing a good job, and keeps them informed about your expectations. Lastly, a check-in process will help new employees learn their jobs faster, become engaged sooner, and increase their progress toward high performance. It will also enhance their desire to stay with the organization.


Planning a development program

You need to consider a number of points when planning how you will train and develop employees. You might begin by asking yourself the following questions:

- What do employees need to know or do, and at what skill level?
- What knowledge, skills, and abilities do they need?
- What do employees already know, and what skills do they already have?
- How soon do employees need training to expand their knowledge and skills?

When you have answered those questions, ask yourself these additional ones:

- What is the best method for delivering this training? On the job? In a classroom? Online?

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- What resources are needed for this training? Money? Time? People? Training materials? Job aids?
 - Depending on the method of delivery that is appropriate and the resources required, can you provide this training or will you need help?

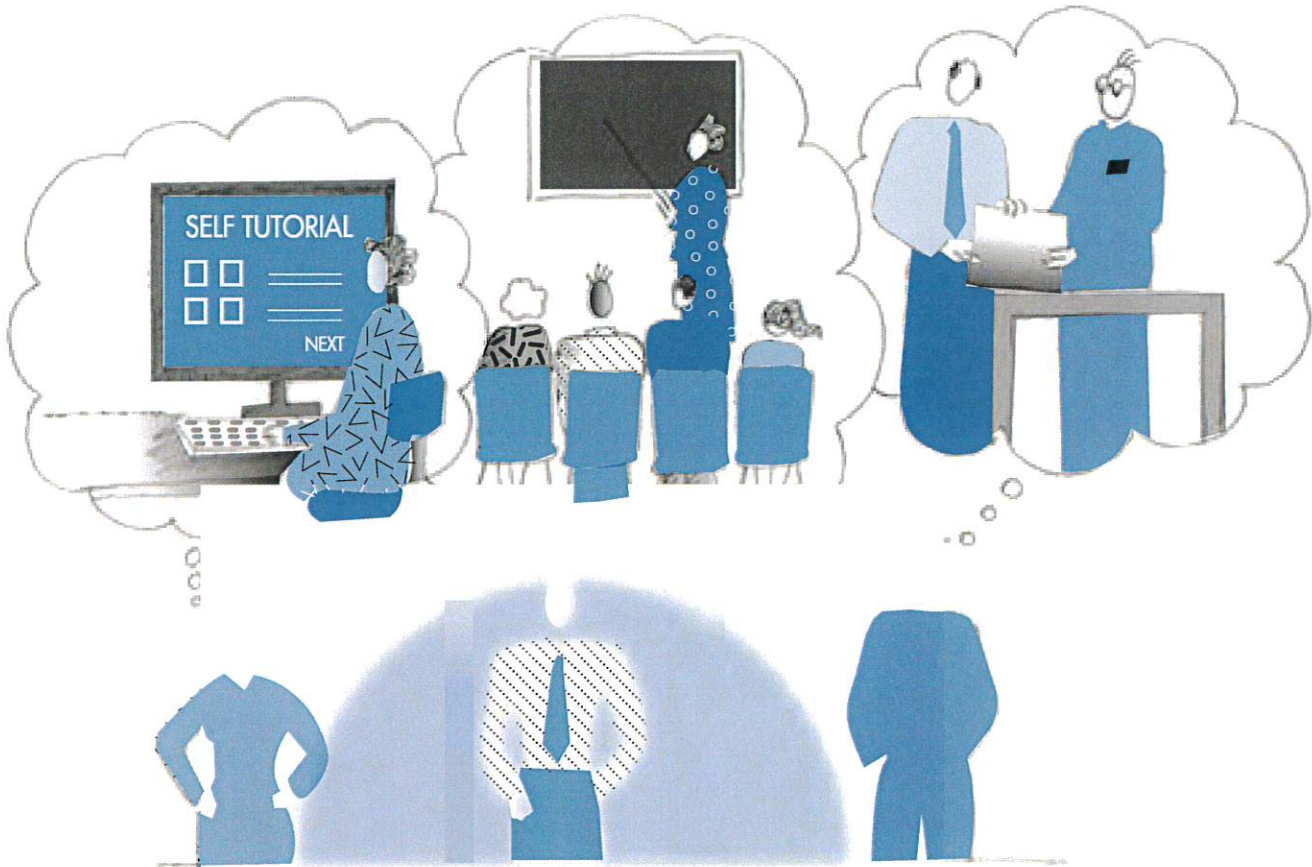
Your HR department will generally provide classroom training or help connect you with appropriate resources for specialized training or online resources. Training opportunities can be found through online databases that allow you to search by topic and geographic area, such as that offered by Seminar Information Service, Inc. at www.seminarinformation.com, which provides information from more than 500 different training companies. As a supervisor, you are primarily responsible for on-the-job training that deals with the specific requirements of carrying out the job successfully.

How we learn

Research has revealed that people learn in different ways. Understanding this can help you design your on-the-job training materials to present information in a way that appeals to all learning styles by including multiple methods of delivery. For example, some people learn best through visual means (illustrations, charts, videos), others by auditory means (listening to presentations), and still others by kinesthetic and tactile means (practice, “learn by doing”).

Adults learn best when they are involved in the process and understand how the information will help them directly. Words can be forgotten quickly, but when words go hand in hand with actions—with doing and participating—your employees are more likely to learn and to retain.

In addition, adult learners retain information when it is given over time. This allows for application of the new knowledge to take place in the work environment. Don't be surprised if new employees need something shown or explained to them several times before they get the hang of it. Learning a new job can feel like drinking out of a fire hose. Your employees are unlikely to catch everything you say or do the first time—especially when they are becoming accustomed to a new environment and new co-workers at the same time they are learning a new job. Be patient and realize in advance that you'll need to review information over time.



If you are explaining a work process, teach the steps of the process in the order in which they are actually done on the job. Training should progress from the easiest idea to the most difficult. This strategy allows employees to build a foundation of knowledge that will help them with the more difficult concepts ahead. Following a logical pattern also means giving reasons: explain why each task is done, and show the connection between facts and the ideas behind them. Employees will remember *how* something is done if they know *why* it is done and how it contributes to successful outcomes.



Job aids and mentors enhance skills

One tool for reinforcing learning is a job aid. A job aid can be a checklist, worksheet, chart, or other written material that the employee can use as a tool after the “instruction.” Job aids help new employees remember what to do and double-check that they have completed all the required steps in a process.

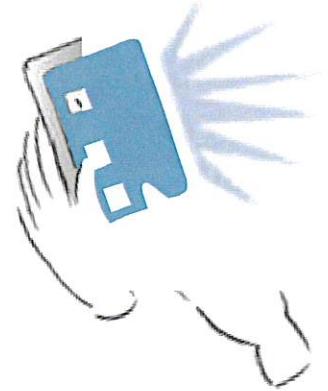
To remember what they learn, adults must also have a chance to practice what they have been taught. Assigning mentors to help employees practice new skills with informal supervision will speed up learning and improve retention. Select an experienced employee to mentor or “shadow” the new employee when they are practicing a new skill. The mentor must be able and willing to give patient, constructive feedback throughout the process. Meet with the mentor separately to get feedback on how the new employee is doing and then follow up with the new employee to share the feedback and to develop a plan for continual improvement.

Summary

Since employees are your most valuable resources, the time you take to conduct complete interviews, carry out your part of the onboarding process, and develop your new employee is well worth the effort to ensure success for both the employee and the organization.

CHECKLIST


- Prepare an accurate, up-to-date job description for advertising a position and interviewing and hiring new employees.
- Be well prepared for interviewing each applicant.
- Be sure that you have cleared your mind of any personal biases in advance to minimize their influence during the interview.
- Only ask questions that genuinely relate to the knowledge and skills listed in the job description.
- Put job applicants at ease during the interview, and be at ease yourself.
- When a new person is hired, state clearly what is expected on the job.
- Listen to the new employee's expectations of the job.
- Check back with new employees regularly on job performance and their reactions to the job.
- Explain the organization's standard operating procedures to new employees.
- Encourage employees to participate in development programs.
- Select or design learning opportunities that meet the needs of adult learners and address the various ways in which people process information.
- After each formal or informal learning opportunity, carefully evaluate how successful it was in improving the employee's work performance.



Supervisory situation 9-1

Mary Dunn is head of administrative operations for the city's library system. She oversees all of the support services for ten library branches. The library system employs two van drivers who are responsible for making deliveries among branches several times a day. Since citizens are able to drop off or request to pick up books at any branch, the drivers are essential in getting materials back and forth. One of the driver positions has been vacant for six months, and Mary is anxious to fill it.

Recently Mary received approval to advertise the position. She assembled an interview panel consisting of one of the library branch managers and a representative from the human resources department. The panel worked together on the interview questions and has been conducting interviews for the past two weeks. Mary



is anxious to conclude the interviews and make a selection so that her new hire can begin at the next new employee orientation date. With only one interview left to go, the panel begins to have scheduling conflicts. It looks like the next time the group can get together is not for several weeks. Since this is a crucial vacancy, Mary decides to conduct the last interview alone.

The final candidate, Wanda, is retired from a small transportation company and has good qualifications. She is a petite woman who looks to be in her 60s. Despite Wanda's excellent responses to the interview questions, Mary tries to picture Wanda lifting the heavy containers of books that go from branch to branch in the library van. When Mary comes to the end of the interview questions she asks Wanda, "I wonder if you have a minute for me to show you the containers that we use to transport books and other materials. I'd like to see you lift one of them."

Wanda replies, "Oh, the ad didn't mention we'd need to do that, but I'll give it a try."

1. What did Mary do correctly in this interview?
2. What did she do wrong?
3. Has Mary exposed her organization to any legal liability?



Supervisory situation 9-2

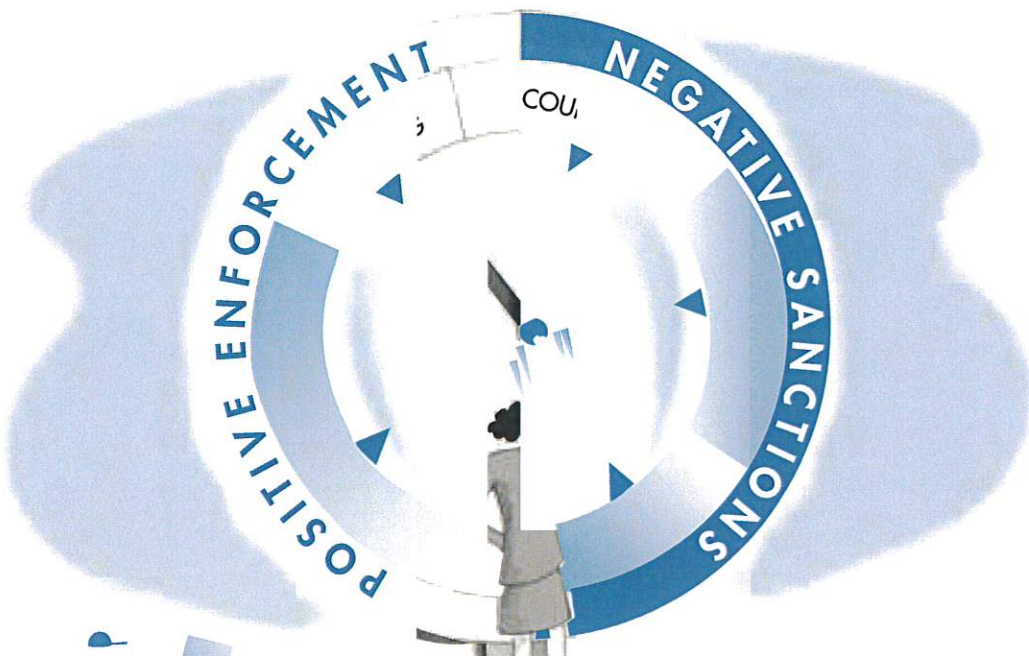
During the onboarding program for all new employees, one hour is designated for training on the county's customer service philosophy. New employees are briefly introduced to a customer service model designed to help employees provide quality service to challenging customers.

A group of new employees assigned to the fleet management department is anxious to finish the onboarding program and get to work. After working for several weeks, complaints begin to come in from several county departments regarding their customer service. Although Bill, the newly promoted supervisor of the fleet management department, has been aware of the customer complaints for several weeks, he has ignored them. Since nothing has improved, complaints have reached Bill's manager. He warns Bill that it is his responsibility to make sure the new employees use their learning from the customer service training on the job.

Bill feels that the new employees received enough training during the onboarding program to provide the expected level of customer service. Therefore, he places a written reprimand for poor customer service performance in each employee's personnel file and tells the employees that the next step would be termination if their customer service does not improve.

The next day, Bill is called into his manager's office. His manager is livid. "What have you been doing down in that garage? I've got a delegation of new employees in my office, and they are hopping mad."

1. What did Bill do wrong?
2. How would you have handled Bill's situation?
3. What steps could Bill take to provide skill development for the new employees in addition to the one-hour customer service training during the onboarding program?



ACCOUNTABILITY IN THE WORKPLACE

Lewis Bender

A cowboy must never go back on his word or a trust confided in him.

**Gene Autry, entertainer
("The Singing Cowboy") and business owner**

10



SNAPSHOT

This chapter examines key concepts of accountability in the workplace and the role supervisors play in making sure employees are accountable for their performance and their behavior. Chapter objectives are to

- Broaden understanding of what accountability is and why it is essential to successful supervision
- Provide tools for building an environment of accountability
- Establish the connection between accountability and progressive discipline.

The chapter will help you answer these questions:

- What is accountability?
- Why is it important to hold yourself and members of the team accountable?
- How do coaching and counseling skills enhance accountability?
- How do you create a performance improvement plan?
- What is the continuum of accountability?
- What is progressive discipline, and how does it fit into the continuum of accountability?

Imagine working in a team or organization where there is no interpersonal or team accountability. It would be mayhem! Indeed, people who have been part of teams where there were minimal levels of accountability can attest to the frustration, sense of unfairness, and reduced productivity. In contrast, people who are members of teams where individual and team accountability are high use words such as proud, fun, and meaningful to describe their experience.

As a supervisor, a major part of your job is ensuring that members of your team are accountable to you, to each other, and to the public they serve. Accountability begins with clear goals and expectations against which you can measure performance. People who are accountable do what they say they will do. They carry out their responsibilities as expected, and consistently contribute to team and division success.

Author Lewis Bender appreciatively recognizes the contributions of Allison McWilliams and Keith Barker, who wrote two corresponding chapters included in the previous edition.

Ignoring bad behavior or poor performance enables employees to continue unacceptable actions. Even worse, ignoring good behavior or good performance may undermine future positive performance.

Continuum of accountability

Accountability involves both negative and positive responses to performance. “Catching employees doing it right” is just as important as acting on unacceptable performance. Regrettably, some people view accountability only as a response to negative performance or behavior.


Feedback you give to ensure accountability should be appropriate to the employee’s performance, commitment, and attitude. For example, how you deal with a team member who is really trying yet still not performing to expectations may be very different from your approach to an employee who isn’t committed to the work unit and is a chronically poor performer. Positive reinforcement works best with an employee with a positive attitude. Negative sanctions using progressive discipline may be necessary with an employee with a negative attitude.

Your responses to an individual’s performance can be viewed along a continuum of accountability that includes responding to both positive and negative behaviors using praise, recognition, and rewards; coaching; counseling; performance improvement plans; and progressive discipline.

Feedback is essential to accountability

Ongoing communication with your team members is crucial to accountability. As a busy supervisor, how do you find time to provide regular feedback to your team? One way is to implement a personal management interview program: a private, regularly scheduled, one-on-one meeting with each of your team members.





These meetings are an opportunity to define roles, expectations, and responsibilities so that your employees all know exactly what is expected of them. You can also use these meetings for coaching and counseling to improve performance.

Regular feedback meetings throughout the year make the annual performance evaluation meeting easier for team members. If you are giving employees regular feedback on what is expected and on how they are doing, there will be no surprises when you meet to review performance for the entire year.

But feedback doesn't have to occur only in scheduled meetings. As a leader, you should constantly be looking for teachable moments—times when you can create learning opportunities based on both positive and negative performance situations. For example, if you feel that a team member could have handled an exchange with an angry customer more effectively, it's important to discuss your observations as close to when the incident occurred as possible. The conversation should be private, and you should give the employee a chance to explain what happened.

Teachable moments also arise when you see team members doing something right. Letting an employee know that you like what you see will help them know how to handle similar situations in the future.

To be an effective team leader and supervisor, you must be able to work from all parts of the continuum, depending on the specific behaviors and situation.

Praise, recognition, and rewards

Develop the habit of emphasizing what's working well and who is performing well. Familiarize yourself with the formal options available in your organization for recognizing and rewarding your high-performing employees and use these systems to reinforce success on your team. In addition, there are many ways to provide positive reinforcement that don't require any organizational structure; you can initiate them on your own as a supervisor.

The following are some suggestions for ways to provide praise, recognition, and rewards:

Praise

- Give credit when credit is due.
- Smile, make eye contact, and say “thank you” whenever appropriate.

- Speak in person, privately, to use one-on-one praise as an opportunity to emphasize your personal and sincere appreciation.
- Write thank-you notes.
- Be specific with oral or written praise. Explicitly describe what your employee did well and why you appreciate it.
- Describe how the individual's accomplishment makes a difference as a valuable contribution to something larger, such as a benefit to the whole team or the goals of the unit or the larger organization.



Recognition

- Recognize an employee's accomplishments publicly at a team meeting, or at a larger meeting before senior leaders and/or colleagues from other departments.
- Write a letter of recommendation or commendation and present it to your employee in person. Put a copy of the letter in the employee's personnel file.
- Ask your department director or the head of the whole organization to attend a meeting to personally recognize and thank your team member.
- Nominate your best employees for awards available in your organization.
- Create an award within your team that you or any team member can present to an especially deserving member of the group.
- Treat your high performer to a cup of coffee or lunch. Use the one-on-one time together to demonstrate a personal interest in your employee and explore ways to support his or her success.

Rewards

- Entrust high performers with more challenging assignments and/or greater responsibilities.
- Give documented high performers prioritized preference to opportunities for professional development, such as attending conferences or desirable training.

- Submit a description of your employee's accomplishments to the employee newsletter, intranet, or internal social media site.
- Explore whether your organization permits you to allocate extra time off or one-time scheduling benefits to an especially high performer.

Coaching

Think back to a time when you were coached. It might have been in school as an athlete or a musician. What qualities did you admire about your coach? Were you pushed to perform to a higher standard? How? What tools did the coach use to inspire you? Were you criticized when you didn't meet standards, or were you shown a path to improved performance? What did you learn about being part of a team?


These are all questions you should ask yourself as you try to improve your coaching skills. The same skills apply to organizations as to the playing field or the concert hall: you are the director of your team, surrounded by players who have diverse talents, abilities, and skills. It is your job to get them all on the path to achieving the same goal—winning a game, receiving a standing ovation, or achieving a performance goal.

Effective coaches don't win by making last-second decisions. They are with the team from the beginning—on the sidelines, shouting words of encouragement, and giving the team the tools it needs to succeed. Just like a coach on the playing field or a conductor in front of an orchestra, an effective organizational team leader sets the standard, provides the tools, gives advice when it is needed, and lets the team play to the best of its abilities.

The following principles can improve your coaching success:

1. **Be a conversation partner.** Coaching means interacting with team members by having regular and frequent conversations about performance.




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2. **Define the outcomes.** To be an effective coach, you must communicate what your vision is for your team. Your employees cannot strive toward a goal unless they know what it is.
 3. **Clarify performance expectations.** Coaching means communicating both organizational and personal goals.
 4. **Build dynamic capability.** As the organization and team members develop their talents and skills, goals will change. Good coaching means helping employees be prepared for each wave of change and learning to learn.
 5. **Engage your team members' interests and passions.** One way to encourage positive performance and professional development is to offer your employees “stretch assignments” that encourage them to develop their skills and talents.
 6. **Recognize teachable moments.** Effective coaches recognize that the smallest incidents can foster learning and growth.
 7. **Use multiple coaching media.** All coaching need not occur face-to-face; it can happen by e-mail, over the phone, or through a written note.
 8. **Provide recognition and rewards.** Coaching isn't just about letting people know when their performance needs improvement; it's also about catching them doing things right.

Effective coaches are able to pinpoint the reason for performance problems—for example, lack of ability versus lack of resources or lack of information—and give team members the tools they need to get the job done well.

Coaching team members for improved performance is an important skill for all supervisors. It is your chance to guide your team to higher levels of performance and achievement and to watch them grow and develop as individuals along the way.

Counseling


Your employees are complex individuals with personal lives and challenges that may affect performance. As an effective leader, you are responsible for helping your employees seek solutions for themselves, particularly when personal challenges affect performance or the overall work environment. This is your counseling role.



Examples of personal challenges that might affect performance include drug or alcohol abuse, marital difficulties, or the pressures of caring for an aging parent.

You may put on your counseling hat if you notice, for example, that an employee seems distressed or is getting into conflicts with another employee. If the behavior is affecting individual performance or work group effectiveness, you need to intervene as a counselor to try to identify causes and strategies for improvement. Key components of effective counseling are empathy, caring, listening, and confidentiality.

- **Empathy** is different than sympathy. With sympathy, you may intellectually understand how someone else is feeling and you may feel concern for them, but with empathy you recognize how such emotions feel within yourself and use that emotional self-awareness to relate to another person. Empathy allows you to put yourself in the other person's shoes. Accessing empathy supports your ability to care.
- **Caring** goes beyond simply accommodating someone's situation and feelings to include holding regard for their situation and feelings. It includes respecting individual characteristics, preferences, needs, opinions, and beliefs even if they are not your own and treating each person fairly. Caring effectively for others also requires that you not lose yourself in other's problems or emotions but rather remain separate from them as you provide support to them.
- **Listening** involves taking an interest in your employees including what is going on in their lives and how they feel about their jobs. It also means employing active listening to be sure that you fully understand messages from your employees.
- **Confidentiality** means not revealing to a third party what an employee told you in trust. There are two exceptions to confidentiality in your counseling role: if an employee is being referred for professional assistance or if a person is a danger to himself or others. In the first case, you will need to talk about the employee's problem to a referral person or agency. However, you must have the employee's permission to do this. In the case of a person who is a danger to himself or to others, you must share the information with the proper authority or agency with or without the employee's permission.



As a supervisor, you are responsible for ensuring that your employees and your work unit achieve agreed-upon goals. Performance, therefore, is the starting point for a counseling discussion. Successful counseling may include:

- Identifying employee needs
- Being supportive
- Providing advice
- Referring employees to your organization's employee assistance program (EAP) when appropriate
- Seeking assistance from the human resources (HR) department in determining how to facilitate a referral to a professional counselor if needed.

Any decline in an employee's performance is cause for concern. It is *not* your responsibility to solve the employee's personal problems. It *is* your responsibility to notice when changes in an employee's performance or behavior affect productivity or the work environment and to address your concerns with that employee.

EMPLOYEE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS

An employee assistance program (EAP) is an employee benefit that is sometimes offered in conjunction with a health insurance plan. EAPs help employees deal with personal problems that might affect their work performance, health, or well-being. Examples of issues for which EAP counselors provide support include

- Substance abuse
- Emotional distress
- Major life events including births, accidents, and deaths
- Health-care concerns
- Financial or legal concerns
- Family/personal/work relationship issues
- Concerns about aging parents.

If your organization has an EAP, become familiar with the services it offers and how employees can contact an EAP counselor when needed.



Performance improvement plans

Sometimes coaching and/or counseling do not raise an employee's performance to the desired level. In these cases, a performance improvement plan may be a useful strategy. A performance improvement plan is a more rigorous and structured form of coaching. It is not a disciplinary action. Instead the plan focuses on developing an employee's skill levels in areas that may be deficient. Unsatisfactory performance may occur for a range of reasons including lack of training, failure to adapt to new techniques, or a poor attitude toward achieving work goals. A performance improvement plan is generally used when preliminary approaches fail to produce desired improvement.

It is important that you consult with your supervisor and/or the HR department before developing a performance improvement plan with an employee, as you must first gain management support and HR guidance.

Performance improvement plans usually involve these five steps:

Step 1: Identify and document the problem

You must first identify and document a pattern of performance or behavior that is not up to expectations. This can be related to a lower skill level or behavior patterns that are not acceptable.

Step 2: Get input

Once you've identified the problem, discuss your findings and observations with the employee and ask for input on how the employee thinks these issues can be corrected.

Step 3: Develop the plan

Taking into account the employee's input, develop a plan for improving the performance. This may involve training, coaching, or more structured attention to established procedures for completing the work.

Step 4: Create the schedule

To be effective in improving performance, you should develop a schedule for monitoring and discussing the employee's performance or behavior over a specific period of time. This may involve weekly, biweekly, or monthly meetings with the employee. You should always have at least two meetings scheduled over a specific time period to send

a clear message to the employee that the process is serious and that you are committed to improving performance or behavior.

Step 5: Monitor, assess, and give feedback

Regular, honest, and direct feedback to the employee will help you monitor progress and let the employee know how things are going. At each meeting, you should discuss areas of improvement and those that need further work. If the assessment and feedback are positive for two consecutive meetings, consider canceling the next scheduled meeting. When you have had a series of positive reviews, celebrate the employee's accomplishments. Once the plan process is completed, continue to monitor this employee's performance in the same manner as the rest of your team members' work.

In cases where the employee fails to meet expectations outlined in the performance plan, you may need to reassess the employee's tasks and roles. This may lead down different paths—from redesigning the employee's job to moving into progressive discipline.

Progressive discipline

As a supervisor, you must strike a balance between ignoring rule violations and pouncing on every mistake. The purpose of any disciplinary measure is to change employee behavior or improve job performance, not to punish the employee. This is a point worth emphasizing to the employee. Unless employees understand that the desired outcome of disciplinary action is improvement, every step in the disciplinary process may become a downward spiral that ends with termination.

Here are the steps that you should follow when a rule has been violated or poor performance persists:

Step 1: Act promptly

When a violation occurs or performance standards are consistently not met, you should take prompt action. This does not mean reprimanding or punishing the



employee on the spot. It does mean that you should immediately begin to investigate the incident to find out exactly what happened. Be sure to notify the employee who may have violated the rule that you are looking into the matter.

If you do or say nothing when a rule is broken, you are condoning the violation. When employees see that you are not enforcing a rule or performance standard, they will soon stop abiding by the rule or standard.

Step 2: Get all the facts

Because most disputes about rule violations arise over the facts, your most important action is to gather all the facts as quickly as possible. Details are likely to be forgotten if there is a delay. Write down what you learn. The facts you gather and record should give a complete picture of the situation so that anyone reading your description of the event will feel that he or she was a witness.

You need the facts


- To decide whether a rule was broken, who broke it, and what action should be taken
- To ensure any decision you make will be objective
- To provide a reliable record in case the disciplinary action is challenged by an employee.

Be sure to ask the employee for an explanation of the incident and record the answer without passing any judgment on the response. If no explanation is given, this fact could be important, especially if an explanation is made at a later date such as at a grievance hearing. Pass no judgment until all the facts are in hand, and you have had time to review them.

In the case of accidents, follow your organization's reporting guidelines. Complete all accident reports promptly and thoroughly.

Informal memos are often a good way to present





the facts. Whatever form your report takes, it should answer the following questions:

- Who was involved?
- Exactly what happened?
- When and where did it happen?
- Who else was there or nearby?
- What was said to the employee?
- What did the employee say?

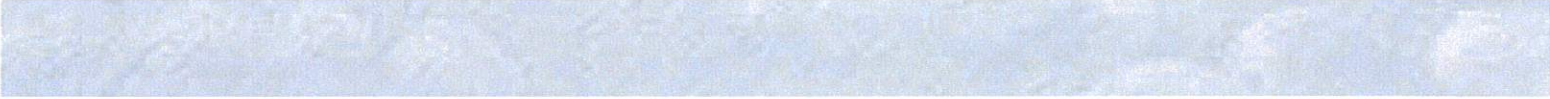
Step 3: Decide what action to take

When you have gathered all the facts, spoken to everyone concerned, and are convinced that the employee did violate a rule, you must use your best judgment to decide what to do.

Take the time you need to make a well-informed decision, but do not delay. Consider all relevant factors and get all the advice you can. You should consult your supervisor and the HR department at this point. They can help guide you through relevant local government policies and legal requirements and ensure that any action you take is consistent with action that would be taken by other supervisors.

To decide what corrective action (if any) is most appropriate, you should first decide how serious the offense was. Ask yourself the following questions:

- Why did the employee commit the violation?
- Was it a major offense?
- How much trouble did it cause?
- What impact did it have on the organization?
- How many people or how much money was involved?
- How many rules were broken?
- How have previous violations of this rule or rules by other employees been dealt with?
- Does the employee have a good conduct and good work record?
- How long has the employee worked in the department?
- When was the last disciplinary action (if any) taken against the employee?
- Did the employee understand the possible consequences of the violation?



Keep in mind that the purpose of disciplinary action is to change behavior, not to punish the employee. How you deal with a disciplinary problem is a question of circumstances, precedent, your judgment, and the employee's personality. Any action you take should be constructive and designed to motivate the employee.

When you are making your decision, consider the possible effects—both good and bad—that your action may have on this employee and on other team members. Once you decide on specific action to take or to recommend to your manager, you must be prepared to explain it and defend it with facts.

Usually, the appropriate disciplinary action is the least severe penalty that is strong enough to convince the employee that the behavior that brought about the disciplinary action will not be tolerated. If the behavior persists and the disciplinary actions increase in severity, it is important to document prior problems and the use of progressively more severe penalties.

When considering a corrective disciplinary action, it is important to keep your supervisor informed and to follow your organization's policies, rules, and protocols related to discipline. This includes adhering to the agreements within any union contract if the employee is part of a bargaining unit.

Most policies on progressive discipline follow a sequence from informal talks to formal spoken warnings, written warnings, suspension, salary reduction, demotion, and dismissal. The following sections highlight each of these disciplinary options.

Informal talks Employees with good records who break minor rules will most likely respond positively to an informal talk. You tell the employee that he or she has violated a rule and ask for an explanation. You caution the employee about repeating the violation, and the matter ends there. No record is kept of this kind of action.

Spoken warning In a spoken warning, you tell the employee that his or her conduct or performance must improve or more serious action will be taken. This warning should always be given in private. A record of the warning should be placed in the employee's work file, but not in his or her permanent HR record. If the employee's behavior improves, the record of the warning should be removed from the file after a period of time, usually six months.

Written warning A written warning is used for more serious offenses or for employees who have broken the same rule several times. A written warning should

- Mention any previous warnings
- Describe what the employee has done wrong
- Indicate what improvement is expected and the time period during which the improvement should be made
- State what will happen if improvement is not made
- Offer your help in bringing about change.


The employee is given a copy of the warning, and copies are also placed in the department's work file and in the employee's permanent record. The warning can be removed from these files after a set period of time if the offense is not repeated and if the removal of warning letters is in compliance with organizational policies.

Suspension A suspension means that an employee is removed from his or her job without pay, usually from one to thirty days. You will almost certainly need the approval and support of your supervisor and the HR department for such action. Suspension is used when an employee violates a major rule or when repeated warnings fail to bring about change. The employee must be given a disciplinary interview before suspension is decided upon. He or she is then notified in a letter delivered personally by the supervisor or by certified mail. The letter should state the reasons for the suspension and the dates on which it begins and ends. It should also tell the employee how, to whom, and by what date he or she can appeal the action.

Salary reduction An employee's salary may be reduced if suspension fails to bring about a change in behavior. The employee must be notified in a letter that states the reasons for the action, spells out the exact amount of the reduction, and explains the employee's right to appeal.

Demotion A demotion is unlikely to improve an employee's behavior and may actually make it worse. For this reason, demotion is rarely used as a form of discipline or is used as a last resort before dismissal. Usually a demotion can be authorized only by a department head or higher management. In some cases, employees are moved to lower job levels because they are having difficulty coping with their jobs. Such changes are not disciplinary actions and should not be regarded as such.





Dismissal Dismissal is reserved for the most serious offenses and is used only after other steps have failed. Generally, only a department head or higher management can authorize dismissal, and even then only after all the facts have been gathered, and it has been determined that the penalty is justified.

Transfer, while not a disciplinary action, is sometimes used as a means of addressing persistent performance or behavior problems. Transferring a problem employee to another department or work group is valid only when there is a personality conflict between the employee and the supervisor that keeps both from performing effectively and affects the morale of the whole unit, or when an employee's skill set is better suited to a different position in another work unit. Transfer is inappropriate when it is used solely as a disciplinary action: removing a problem employee from a particular work group simply passes the problem on to another supervisor.

Step 4: Hold a disciplinary interview


After gathering all the facts and considering all appropriate disciplinary actions, you must talk to the employee who violated the rule before making a final decision. The purpose of this interview is to get the employee's side of the story.

Before you begin the interview, you should have a good idea of what disciplinary action seems appropriate based on the facts. If the employee gives you information that you had not considered or that you did not know about, it is possible that you will want to reconsider what you had in mind before the interview. You should not change your mind because the interview makes you feel more or less sympathetic toward the employee.

The interview should

- Be held in private without outside interruptions
- Be based on the facts you have collected
- Allow and encourage the employee to give his or her account of the situation
- End when the employee has given his or her version of the incident and has no further facts to add.

At this point you would tell the employee what he or she did wrong. If the disciplinary action you have decided to take is beyond an informal talk, you should tell the employee what action you will take or recommend to your supervisor.



You should specify what the employee must do, and in what specific period of time, to improve his or her performance or behavior. Be sure the employee understands what changes are expected by when, and what will happen if the changes are not made. Finally, before the employee leaves, you should inform him or her of the right to appeal your decision and explain how, when, and where the appeal can be made.

Be fair, calm, and businesslike throughout the interview. If you find you are losing your temper, stop the interview and reschedule it for later in the day. Treat the employee like an adult, and restrict your comments to the employee's performance or work conduct.

After the interview, write up the main points that were discussed, being sure to include the goals for improvement. Place the record of the interview in the employee's work file.


Step 5: Use the appeal procedure

In an effective disciplinary system, the employee has the right to appeal to a third party. As the supervisor, you should inform the employee about the appeal procedure and help with the appeal if necessary. You should be familiar with your organization's appeal process and be sure the employee has all the information needed to exercise his or her right to appeal your decision.

Emphasize to the employee that he or she is completely protected from reprisal if an appeal is filed. Remember that an employee who feels wronged and cannot get justice inside the organization may decide to take you to court outside the organization—a situation that could be most unpleasant for all.

Special considerations in unionized local governments

In local governments that have bargaining units, disciplinary measures must be in accordance with the procedures specified in the labor contract. Most of the guidance provided in this chapter is applicable to both non-union-represented and union-represented employees; in addition, the labor contract in a union-represented environment will usually guarantee the right, as a final step, to appeal a disciplinary decision to a neutral third party. In local governments that do not have bargaining units, the right to appeal a disciplinary action typically exists, but there is little consistency among local governments in assigning final decision-making power.



Labor contracts always address dismissal, and most include a clause stating that dismissal can take place only “for cause” or “for just cause.” The legal effect of this clause is to require that the constitutional guarantee of due process, as defined by state and federal court decisions, be observed in any dismissal action. If you dismiss an employee in a unionized local government, a step-by-step process should be followed before the employee is deprived of his or her job or income:

- Determine what happened and write a letter or a memorandum to the employee explaining your concerns. Include factual allegations in writing and cite the rules that were violated. Allegation is a legal term for a statement you intend to prove.
- Give the employee a copy of any written complaint upon which a disciplinary action may be based.
- Let the employee know in writing about any disciplinary action you are considering, such as suspension or dismissal.
- Give the employee a chance to reply to the allegations in writing. Give a specific date and time for his or her reply, allowing at least forty-eight hours from the time of receipt of your allegations.
- Give the employee a chance to talk to you personally to present his or her side of the story. Set up a definite date, time, and place for the meeting, preferably one day after you have received the employee’s written reply.
- Let the employee know in writing when the decision will be made and when the employee will be notified.
- Allow the employee to resign, but do not suggest or urge him or her to resign or offer any incentive for the employee to do so.

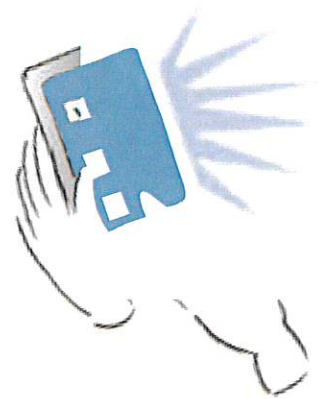
It is always prudent to check with your supervisor, the HR department, or the labor relations office to review the steps to be followed for dismissal or other major actions. In addition to being good management practice, this assures a defensible position if your action is appealed.

Summary

Teams and team members cannot be effective in an environment that lacks accountability. Accountability is not a negative sanction or reaction to someone breaking the rules or failing to perform. Instead, it involves a continuum of responses ranging from positive reinforcement through coaching, counseling, and mentoring and finally to sanctions such as progressive discipline. An effective team leader must be willing to and capable of using the entire continuum of accountability.

CHECKLIST

- Recognize that you are the first person who must be held accountable. You can't hold others accountable if you aren't doing what you say you will do.
- Provide ongoing feedback, and seek out teachable moments with your employees.
- "Catch" employees doing something right in addition to holding them accountable for doing something wrong.
- Recognize that accountability is a continuum ranging from positive reinforcement to sanctions.
- Assess your own ability to coach and counsel.
- Watch for performance problems that may stem from team members' personal circumstances.
- Know the human resource rules and regulations of your organization.
- Conduct regular meetings to discuss changes in policies and rules with employees.
- Maintain a secure file on all members of your work team.
- Apply rules consistently to employees.
- When you have to correct an employee's behavior, discuss the problem privately and direct your comments toward the problem, not the person.
- Consider creating a performance improvement plan to guide employee improvement.
- Always check with your supervisor and the HR department or higher management, as necessary, before implementing any severe disciplinary action.



Supervisory situation 10-1

Josie has worked for the clerk's office for two years. She is a bright, energetic young woman who is well liked by citizens and her co-workers. She greets people with a cheery smile and works hard to make sure people at the clerk's office counter are served promptly. Josie's charming personality has helped to diffuse potentially difficult situations involving local residents.

Josie's job also requires focused work at her desk. This involves reconciling funds coming in from various accounts. If Josie doesn't complete her work, others in the office are not able to complete their work. Josie's people orientation has become a major distraction from her more focused desk duties. At every opportunity she jumps up to greet people at the counter or engages others in the office in extended conversations. Her work has suffered, and people in the office have complained to Deputy Clerk Maria that Josie is holding them up and that her loud laughter is a distraction.


Maria has briefly addressed this issue with Jose in the past, but there has been no change in her behavior or performance. Josie is a sensitive person and is easily hurt by negative feedback.

1. How should Maria address this issue? How would you handle it if Josie reported to you?
2. What should Maria say to other members of the team who are complaining about Josie's low productivity and her office distraction?

Supervisory situation 10-2

Rob has worked for the Water Billing Department for five years. He is personable and generally does a good, but not stellar, job. With recent staff cuts and a new computer billing program, team members have been asked to do more than they have in the past.

Jason, Rob's team leader, has noticed that Rob has not kept pace with the changes. At times he seems distracted and unable to focus on the job. Others in the team have told Jason that Rob seems to be constantly texting and tweeting during the work day. Sometimes he hides his cell phone in his lap as he tweets his friends in what turn out to be fairly extended exchanges. Rob has also been seen texting or



tweeting on his cell phone while discussing billing issues with residents on the office phone. It is also not unusual for Rob to interrupt a business conversation with fellow workers to respond to a text or tweet. It is almost as if Rob is addicted to his cell phone, and that addiction is reducing his overall productivity and his ability to adapt to the new job expectations.

Rob has complained regularly that he needs more training to learn the new computer billing program. In addition, he has regularly asked to work overtime to complete his work. He is the only person in the office who has reported difficulty learning the new software system or getting work completed on time.


1. How should Jason handle the situation with Rob?
2. What component of the continuum of accountability is appropriate for this situation?
3. If Rob does not cooperate with Jason, what steps should he take?
4. Is this a possible referral to the Employee Assistance Program? Why or why not?
5. How would you handle the situation?

Supervisory situation 10-3

John has been employed for seven years as a motor vehicle operator in the county's bulk item disposal program. He works as part of a two-person team picking up discarded bulk items such as refrigerators, washers and dryers, and sofas. As the driver, John is also the team leader.

In order to have bulk items picked up, residents schedule times online or call the dispatch office. The dispatcher then gives John and the other team leaders a list of their daily pickups. Residents must place their discarded items on the curb outside their homes the night before the scheduled pickup. However, some residents set items out just as John arrives in his truck. This upsets John because he must wait for the resident to bring the items to the curb, which causes him to run behind schedule and affects his preferred lunch hour.

On a day when this occurred, over the objections of his co-worker, John decided that he would bypass any homes where items weren't already outside, thus requiring residents to schedule a new pickup date. Residents became upset when this occurred because it required them to remove the items from the curb, or risk receiving a citation



from the code enforcement office. Several residents called the dispatcher to complain. The dispatcher passed the complaint on to John's supervisor, who reminded John and his co-worker that they are expected to not only pick up items but also provide good customer service.

John improved for awhile and the complaints stopped, but as the weather got warmer, he started bypassing late residents again. This resulted in calls to the county board office, which passed the complaints on to the county manager, who, in turn, contacted the department head. The department head told John's supervisor to address the problem immediately, particularly since this wasn't a first-time complaint about John's route.

1. Is disciplinary action warranted in this case?
2. If so, who should be disciplined?
3. What, if any, action should be taken?



11

EVALUATING PERFORMANCE

Lewis Bender

All the Woulda-Coulda-Shouldas
Layin' in the sun.
Talkin' 'bout the things
They woulda-coulda-shoulda done...
But those Woulda-Coulda-Shouldas
All ran away and hid
From one little *did*.

Shel Silverstein, poet, cartoonist, and author



SNAPSHOT

Performance evaluation is an essential, but often misunderstood, management tool. This chapter focuses on the benefits of a well-designed and well-implemented performance evaluation system. Chapter objectives are to

- Help supervisors develop a positive approach and attitude toward performance evaluation
- Increase understanding of the ongoing evaluation cycle and how it contributes to the annual performance rating
- Provide tools and guidance for carrying out successful performance evaluations and avoiding common pitfalls.


The chapter will help you answer these questions:

- Why do you evaluate work performance?
- How can you establish clear expectations between you and team members?
- How can you conduct a performance evaluation that helps both you and your team members?
- How can you be sure your evaluations are fair?
- How do you conduct a formal evaluation interview?
- What legal considerations will affect evaluation?

Evaluations are one of the most widely misunderstood and misused forms of organizational accountability. Positive comments about the performance evaluation experience from either supervisors or employees are rare. Supervisors frequently complain that the process is time-consuming and unproductive. Employees often discount their performance evaluations, suggesting that the process and the outcomes really aren't important to them. Often, the loudest complaints come from low performers or employees who believe they were rated too low or unfairly.

Some complaints are legitimate. A poorly done performance evaluation can destroy an employee's sense of accomplishment and pride in the job. Indeed, super-

Author Lewis Bender appreciatively recognizes the contributions of Stephen E. Condrey and Carl McCoy, who wrote the version of this chapter included in the previous edition.



visors who give lip service to the performance evaluation process can send a powerfully negative message to employees. “Why should I care about doing a good job if my supervisor doesn’t care?” becomes the refrain of low-performing and middle-range performers. Poorly done performance evaluations can actually do more harm than no performance evaluation at all.

A different view of performance evaluation

As demands on local governments continue to expand while resources are limited, supervisors and their employees tend to operate in reactive mode. They go through days and weeks of reacting to this problem or that crisis with little or no opportunity to think about how the team is doing in accomplishing its shared goals. A high-pressure environment forces you to focus only on near-term problems rather than


THE MISUNDERSTANDINGS AND OPPORTUNITIES OF PERFORMANCE REVIEWS

Myths

- People don't like to have their work performance reviewed.
- A performance evaluation is a one-way conversation from the boss to the employee.
- A performance evaluation is a waste of time, especially if it isn't tied to wages.
- Employees don't take performance evaluations seriously because they don't care what the boss thinks about their work.
- Performance evaluations only focus on poor performance and problem behavior.

Realities

- The performance evaluation interview is about a fascinating topic—namely, oneself.
- A performance evaluation is a discussion about the job, changes, challenges, accomplishments, and the employee's future in the organization.
- A performance evaluation is an opportunity to recognize accomplishments and positive behavior and address needed changes and opportunities for improvement.
- Most employees care about their work and what their supervisors think about their performance.
- Performance evaluations are balanced discussions focusing on positive and negative performance.



long-term growth and development. Effectively done performance evaluations give you a tool for interrupting this reactive process and focusing on your most important resource: the members of your team.

Your approach and attitude toward performance evaluations has a huge impact on how your employees regard the process. You will have a positive impact on your employees if you treat the performance evaluation process as an opportunity to

- Clarify job expectations between you and your team members
- Address needed changes in the job, the organization, and the work environment
- Coach and counsel team members to improve performance
- Acknowledge the work of team members who are meeting or exceeding performance expectations
- Hold low-performing employees accountable and identify ways to improve their performance
- Communicate and reconnect with team members.

If you view performance evaluation as just another job requirement, the outcomes won't be positive for you or your employees.

The evaluation cycle

You might think of evaluation as an action that takes place at the end of something—for instance, the end of a probationary period or a year. In truth, the evaluation process is ongoing. The formal step of recording progress, goals, objectives, and observations should never replace your responsibility to provide people with regular feedback about their performance. Immediate and ongoing feedback throughout the year is essential to keep employees on track in achieving goals and meeting expectations.

For new employees, the evaluation cycle begins the day a person accepts a job and continues throughout the year. The job description, list of major responsibilities, how the job fits in with others in the organization, and a description of the employee's qualifications all provide a framework for evaluating performance. Within the first two weeks, you should create performance goals with and for a new employee and explain how the employee's individual goals relate to the work unit's goals and

the vision and mission of the organization.

Over the first three to six months, you should focus on

- Clarifying responsibilities, assignments, authority, and relationships with other departments and people
- Providing information about major work assignments to ensure complete understanding and feedback on how well those assignments are carried out
- Describing the evaluation process and the job factors that are important for both the early performance assessments and the annual review.




Do not underestimate the amount of information and explanation new employees need in order to succeed. Most supervisors do not provide enough information; most new employees fail to ask enough questions because they are afraid to admit how much they don't know. [See the section on *employee onboarding* in chapter 9 for more information.]

For seasoned employees, you will generally spend less time on clarifying responsibilities while still providing regular feedback throughout the year.

A year-long process rather than an event

Recognizing that the evaluation cycle is ongoing—rather than an isolated annual event—will help you stay connected to employee performance throughout the year and prepare employees for a productive annual evaluation. Many organizations schedule evaluations once a year, such as on the anniversary of the person's hiring, at the beginning of the calendar year, or at the end of the government's fiscal year. Unfortunately, this approach often means that performance is discussed infrequently. By the time an annual evaluation is held, employee actions that should be discussed are old and perhaps forgotten.

When viewed as an annual cycle rather than an event, completion of the official performance evaluation instrument and interview is the final step in a year-long



performance discussion and the beginning of planning for the coming year. Effective performance evaluation is built around continuous and ongoing feedback. Therefore, there should be no surprises during a formal evaluation interview.

In addition, if the evaluation factors and goals are stated clearly and your employees have kept good records of work accomplished, you will not have to point out which job factors and goals have not been met. Your employee will see this without help. Thus, the evaluation serves a developmental purpose and is not a punitive or disciplinary process.

During the evaluation process, you should always focus on performance results—not on personality or personal shortcomings and failures. Employees should be praised for all jobs completed satisfactorily and on schedule. In cases where goals were not met, you should help your employee determine what problems occurred and how they can be overcome.

Establishing performance criteria

Regardless of the rating scale or assessment instrument your organization uses, the bottom line is whether you and the person you are evaluating clearly understand and share the same job performance expectations. Too often, the employee finds out what the supervisor's expectations are after the performance evaluation is completed. This is not a fair or effective way to achieve positive performance, and it can lead to a negative and unproductive evaluation.

For a performance evaluation to be fair and effective, it is essential that you discuss and clarify the job expectations and standards you will use with your employee early in the performance cycle. This includes both organizationwide evaluation factors and goals tailored specifically to individual jobs.

If your organization has a performance evaluation instrument, you can follow these steps to ensure that all employees understand the evaluation factors and how they relate to their jobs:

- Meet with your team to review evaluation factors that are in the instrument. Examples of typical evaluation factors include timeliness of work and customer service. What do they think the factors mean? What do you think the factors mean? How do the factors apply to this team? Are there exceptions to how they are applied?

- Discuss the rating standard—such as excellent, good, and poor—that you will give for these performance factors. What guidelines will you use for assigning ratings to individual performance? What do your employees believe you should keep in mind as you make your decisions?
- To the degree that you need to establish greater clarity, discuss the instrument and standards with each member of your team individually before the performance evaluation period begins.

Setting goals

Beyond the organizational factors used to evaluate job performance you should identify specific goals with each team member. Progress toward these employee goals should also be evaluated as part of the overall performance evaluation.

Every six to twelve months, develop and discuss with all team members their goals for the next work and review period. Employees should contribute as much as possible to setting their goals at this stage. Of course, you lead the goal-setting process to make sure that the goals fit in with the realities of the work group and support department goals and the organization mission and vision. But even people whose jobs are very precisely defined can and should be given the chance to express their own goals in their own words.

Employee goals

- Include actions that are designed specifically to fulfill the responsibilities spelled out in the job description and the role of the employee on the team
- Cover actions like training that will help the person meet those responsibilities
- Are challenging but realistic.

You and your employees should agree that all established goals are relevant to their specific jobs, are defined in the right order of importance, and are achievable within the established time frame.



You can use the same model for individual employee goals that you use to set strategic goals for your work group, such as VISTA¹ or SMART² goals:

VISTA Goals

Visualized
Inspirational
Specific
Time bound
Assessable

SMART Goals

Specific
Measurable
Attainable
Relevant
Timely


Setting standards for goals

Once goals have been set, work with your employees to decide how their jobs should be done—that is, what will be considered satisfactory performance and how it will be measured. Your employees may not agree with all the standards you set, but the fact that they have had some say in the process will create fewer disagreements or disappointments later on.

Conducting an evaluation interview

You should have at least one formal evaluation interview each year with each member of your team. Many organizations also encourage or require six-month evaluation interviews. When accompanied by periodic informal discussions throughout the year to measure progress and give feedback on accomplishments and problems, an annual or six-month evaluation interview can be a valuable opportunity to review overall job performance. Discussing past performance and planning for the future can be a positive, constructive, and even enjoyable experience for both you and your employees. Whether or not a major improvement in job performance is needed, it is critical to have a formal evaluation interview.

The evaluation interview should be held in a private, quiet, neutral place, such as a conference room or an empty office where no one will overhear or interrupt the conversation. Sit side by side instead of across physical barriers, such as tables or desks; this emphasizes that you are a partner with the employee rather than a judge



or adversary. Before the interview takes place, review the employee's job description or duty list, performance criteria, and goals. Suggest that the employee prepare by reviewing the same information and by reflecting on personal job performance during the past evaluation period. Many organizations require employees to complete written self-evaluations to ensure that the employee's perspective is considered by the supervisor.


At the beginning of the meeting, state the purpose of the interview and the specific goals of the meeting. During the interview, discuss performance ratings first and then developmental goals.

You should review the evaluation report point by point with your employee; make sure you each have a copy of the completed report to review together. To support your ratings, provide examples of performance. Be sure to discuss specific work completed, overall achievements, and behaviors, not personal traits. When giving negative feedback, discuss how the performance failed to meet the established standards or goals, provide specific examples of actions that failed to meet expectations, and discuss what should be done to improve performance. Try to improve future work by focusing on what was learned about performance during the past evaluation period. [See the section on *giving performance feedback* in chapter 8 for more information.]

Encourage the team member to communicate during the interview; listen to the comments and respond appropriately. You should encourage two-way dialogue during the interview, rather than you doing most of the talking.

GUIDELINES FOR CONDUCTING AN EVALUATION INTERVIEW

- Schedule one to two weeks in advance to give your employee time to prepare.
- Plan for the interview.
- Avoid distractions.
- Hold the interview in a neutral space.
- Prepare for the interview.
- Stick to work-related comments and questions.
- Focus on the employee's development.



End the interview with a summary of the major points that were discussed; emphasize the work that has been accomplished and plans for the next evaluation period. This ensures closure and shared understanding.

Handling difficult discussions

Some interviews may be difficult, no matter how well prepared you are. These guidelines will help you prepare for and carry out more difficult evaluation interviews:

- Show that you are concerned about your employee and interested in his or her point of view
- Keep the discussion focused on job-related issues
- Be firm if you have critical comments to make
- Back up any negative feedback with facts and examples
- Never allow yourself to get into an argument or lose your temper with the employee
- Keep your cool even if the employee becomes defensive or aggressive.

If the discussion gets heated, there is no benefit in responding with angry behavior. As a supervisor, part of your job is to model the behavior you expect from your employees, so losing your temper sends the wrong message. Stay focused on your message by emphasizing the shared goals of the team and the larger mission and vision of the organization that every team member supports. If you need to take a break to allow the employee to cool off and to gather your thoughts, adjourn the meeting for a specific amount of time rather than continuing an unproductive discussion. A fifteen- or twenty-minute break may be what's needed to get the conversation back on track.

Maintaining employee records

No matter what type of evaluation you carry out, always document factual information about employee progress and place this in the employee's personnel file. No elaborate system of record keeping is required, but all significant information should be recorded, kept up-to-date, and shared with the employee. Keeping a critical-incident log is a good way to track important events and observations. In this

type of record keeping, you maintain a weekly or monthly bullet-point log of positive and negative employee actions. Examples of actions that should be recorded include confirmed goals, work output, specific achievements on the job, action you have taken to support the employee, and recognition given for accomplishments. It is especially important to maintain accurate performance logs and records of instances of unsatisfactory performance including when and how you addressed those incidents.

While accurate and complete documentation is critical, it is equally important to inform the employee of any positive or negative observations you are making. Your goal is to do whatever will help your employees improve performance. Constant feedback—including a written notice of a job well done—will help employees improve their job performance and reinforce the message that they are valued team members. Most employees appreciate feedback when it is presented in a constructive, even-handed way.

Evaluation and compensation

Most of the evaluation discussions you have with employees should be developmental; focus on improving performance in the future. Wage or salary adjustments, in contrast, are designed to recognize and reward past performance and to keep the person's rate of pay at a level that is appropriate and fair for the services rendered. When the two evaluation activities are kept separate and distinct, you and your employees can concentrate on the specific purpose of the discussion. For example, the performance evaluation interview should focus on how the employee can improve performance or maintain high performance, not on the value of the next salary increase.

Your local government's personnel policies may require that performance evaluation and pay adjustments be conducted in a particular way. Your role in influencing compensation may be very broad or very limited. Whatever the case, your role is to focus on guiding the person toward better performance and future success in your organization.



Legal considerations

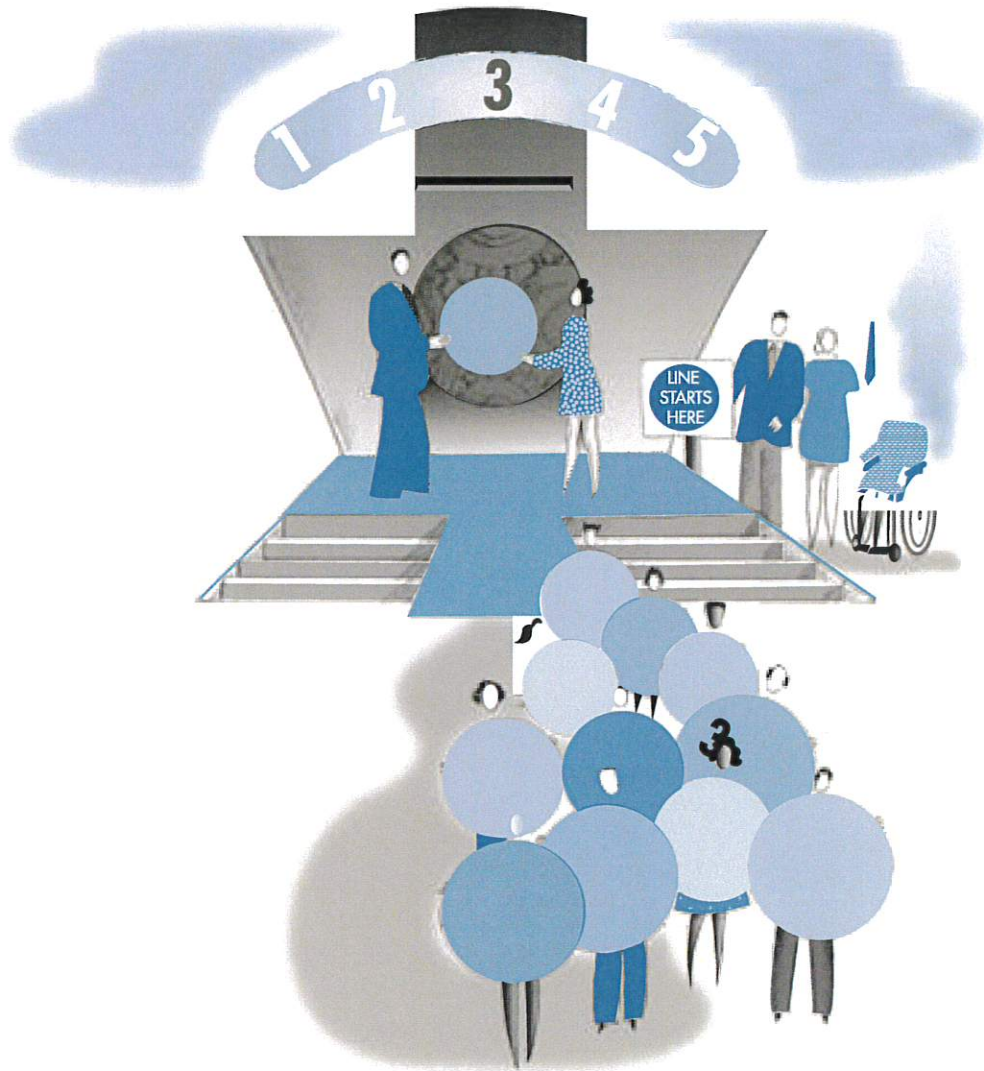
In addition to the organizational reasons for seeking valid and reliable measures to assess performance, there are legal considerations. Court decisions have established performance evaluation as a type of selection tool or test. Therefore, the performance evaluation must be based on a thorough analysis of job requirements. An improperly constructed or administered performance evaluation tool can result in charges of discrimination under Title VII of the Civil Rights Act of 1964 if the evaluation instrument has an adverse impact on protected groups. These are the characteristics of a legally acceptable performance evaluation system:

- The performance evaluation instrument is developed from a systematic analysis of individual jobs
- Job descriptions used in the evaluation process are kept up-to-date
- The performance evaluation focuses on specific, job-related behaviors rather than traits, abilities, or personal characteristics
- Performance standards or goals are communicated to employees
- Supervisors are trained to evaluate employees
- Written documentation about the evaluation process is maintained.³

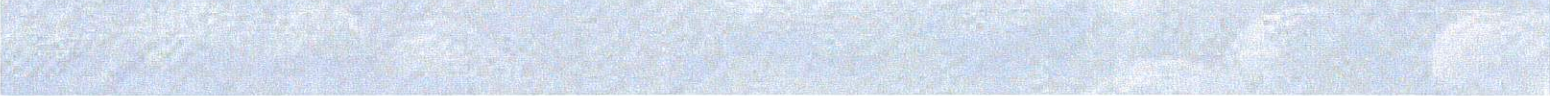
Common performance evaluation errors

No matter how rigorous the process used to develop a performance evaluation tool, it is of little value unless it is carried out effectively. Common errors can significantly undermine the value of the performance evaluation process. Typical evaluation errors include the following:⁴

- The **central tendency effect** happens when the supervisor rates everyone at the midpoint of the scale, regardless of performance. For example, all employees are given a rating of three on a one-to-five scale. The general rule is that it should take as much evidence and observable pattern of behavior to give a person a five (high) as it would to give them a one (low).
- The **recency factor** occurs when the supervisor rates an employee on the basis of a recent event (either positive or negative) and disregards the remainder of the evaluation period. It is essential to take the entire rating period into consideration when completing the performance evaluation.



The central tendency effect happens when everyone is rated at the midpoint of the scale. Avoid that error by basing your ratings on actual evidence for each employee.

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- The **halo or horn** effect happens when the supervisor lets especially positive (halo) or negative (horn) performance in one area influence the ratings for other areas. For example, a person may have excellent verbal skills but poor writing skills. It is important to be able to separate these two qualities for the purpose of conducting a performance evaluation.
 - **Personal bias** occurs when the supervisor allows factors not related to job duties to influence an employee's performance ratings. For example, a supervisor's personal affinity for a team member could interfere with an honest assessment of performance.

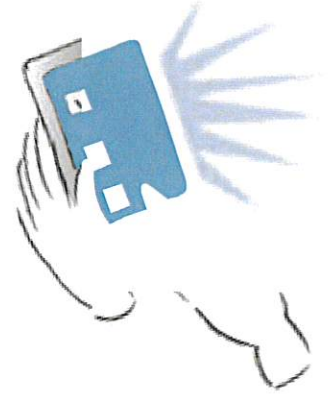
Keep these potential errors and pitfalls in mind when completing both the performance evaluation form and the performance evaluation interview for a fair, legally sound, and satisfying outcome.

Summary

Performance evaluation is a key tool for holding your employees accountable for their work and actions. Effective use of the performance evaluation process will help you reinforce positive job performance and behavior and provide a legitimate and fair approach for addressing poor or problematic job performance and behavior.

CHECKLIST

- Commit to performing fair and effective performance appraisals. Walk your talk.
- Involve your employees in discussing the job factors that will be evaluated. Ask for their input before identifying or clarifying performance evaluation factors.
- Clarify expectations. Be sure that employees understand their authority, their responsibility, and what is expected of them.
- Involve employees in setting goals, determining performance standards, and developing ways of measuring results.
- Compare work results frequently against the agreed-upon goals.
- Do not evaluate until you have enough information to do a fair and thorough job.
- Work with team members to make the evaluation successful, to identify ways of improving work performance, and to set new goals.
- Keep written records of all actions and impressions.
- When possible, keep performance evaluations separate from salary adjustments.
- View performance evaluation as a developmental process.




Endnotes

- 1 Ross Page, *Everyone Agrees With TOM!* (London, United Kingdom: Ross Page, 2007).
- 2 George Doran, "There's a S.M.A.R.T. Way to Write Management's Goals and Objectives," *Management Review* 70 (November 1981; AMA FORUM), 35-36. [According to Wikipedia, this is the first reference to S.M.A.R.T. goals.]
- 3 Stephen E. Condrey, *Appraising Employee Performance* (Athens, GA: Carl Vinson Institute of Government, University of Georgia, 2003).
- 4 Ibid.

Supervisory situation 11-1

By all accounts, Officer Harry Jones is a talented police officer who rarely applies his talents to the job. If there is an easy way out or a convenient way to avoid work, Officer Jones generally finds it. Beyond his minimalist approach to work, Officer Jones has been known to try to intimidate other officers. For example, if other officers comment on his lack of productivity or his attitude, Officer Jones will confront his colleagues with a finger to the face or an intimidating tone. He will even occasionally take the same approach with his shift commander, Sergeant Nobles.



Sergeant Nobles is known in the department as the “easy rider” supervisor. He is a friendly guy who avoids conflict and tough decisions. Because of his seniority, Officer Jones has always been able to bid for and get Sergeant Nobles as his shift supervisor. Officer Jones never received a negative or unfavorable performance evaluation from Sergeant Nobles. In fact, Officer Jones’s evaluations suggest that he is a high performer.


Recently, Sergeant Tom Strickland became Officer Jones’s new shift supervisor. Sergeant Strickland is a firm, fair team leader who is widely respected for his mature judgment and his attention to detail.

It became evident quickly that Sergeant Strickland’s expectations of the job, behavior, and performance are much higher than those of his predecessor. It also became evident that Officer Jones would most likely resist any changes in his performance or behavior.

1. How should Sergeant Strickland handle the relationship with Officer Jones?
2. What should Sergeant Strickland do at the beginning of the evaluation period?
3. How should Sergeant Strickland deal with Officer Jones if he resists Sergeant Strickland’s efforts to change his performance and behavior?
4. What communication should Sergeant Strickland have with his supervisor about his new report?

Supervisory situation 11-2

Carolyn has been employed as a community planner in the Recreation Department for eleven months under your supervision. She is intelligent, charismatic, articulate, and honest—qualities that allow her to interact effectively with the community. Her work is always done on time and is high quality. However, you have observed that Carolyn seems aloof when interacting with her colleagues and condescending to administrative and support staff. She is also argumentative when you ask her to perform tasks she doesn’t like or agree with. You have coached Carolyn on her workplace interactions during your bi-weekly one-on-one meetings. In addition, you gave her a counseling memo about her attitude after she scolded the unit’s administrative assistant to the point that the assistant left the office in tears. Carolyn’s anniversary



date is in one month, and you will be preparing her performance evaluation including whether Carolyn should be retained as a permanent employee.

1. What are your options?
2. What, if anything, could you as Carolyn's supervisor have done better?
3. Develop your recommendation on Carolyn's future status.

Supervisory situation 11-3

Street Foreman John Anderson frequently complains that the organization's performance evaluation process is "a huge waste of time." "My people know what their jobs are, and they get their jobs done. It is a waste of their time and mine going through every little petty element of their work," he said. As a result of this view, John gives everyone the highest possible ratings, which makes John's crew the highest rated in the department.

Several other foremen and forewomen have complained to Street Superintendent Bob Mays about the high ratings that everyone on John's crew always receives. Bob knows that, despite the high ratings, John's crew is not the most productive in the department. Other foremen and forewomen take the performance evaluation process very seriously, document performance carefully, and generally give fair and balanced ratings.

1. What is the impact of John's approach on the credibility of the overall performance evaluation system?
2. What is its impact on other foremen and forewomen in the department and how they approach the evaluation system?
3. How should Superintendent Mays handle the situation?
4. What would you do?

