

The Dreaded Performance Evaluation

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Organizations exist for a purpose. Their primary *raison d'être* often consists of many elements that do not include looking after their employees. In the best of HR circumstances, looking after employees is secondary to the organization's primary purpose but all too frequently, looking after employees, slips way past the second spot on the list of an organization's priorities. In addition to this systemic issue, performance evaluations (PEs) can become unpopular in an organization if these important evaluation tools are unappreciated and loathed by management and staff for multiple reasons such as: (i) lack of understanding of its purpose in the organization's overall mission; (ii) lack of relevancy; (iii) lack of simplicity; (iv) lack of connectedness to job functions and training/developmental needs; (v) lack of training in the proper use of the tool, and other various reasons.

Operational reviews or organizational assessments all too frequently reveal PE programs that do not exist or are severely deficient. Some of these deficiencies may be attributed to the lack of serious consideration being given to this tool as an important element in achieving the full potential of the workforce. Moreover, the PE programs often reveal that these evaluations are done merely as a way of "simply getting over it". It is quite often that we have encountered situations where an employee has received satisfactory evaluations throughout his/her career only to be met with a dismissal for cause for longstanding poor performance and/or conduct, which was never reflected in the employee PE.

An effective PE program requires careful thought

and a reasonable piece of everyone's finite time. PEs should also fit within the context of all that a Human Resources program offers to care for and guide an employee's development within the organization.

Monitoring performance is an ongoing supervisory function that should culminate in a PE within prescribed intervals. If this monitoring is lacking, the PE will depend upon the respective memories of those involved, and as we all know, memories can prove to be inaccurate. At best, a PE should spring no surprises when occurring. Monitoring should be undertaken with some caution since monitoring employee performance is now falling into the realm of surveillance. We now have the electronic capacity to record off-site transactions and hours of activity as Artificial Intelligence algorithms produce the encapsulated results of analyzing an individual's performance against data being simultaneously generated from the organization's employees. While this can offer advantages related to objectivity, the electronic monitoring of employees can go too far. Intrusive surveillance is not acceptable to the concept of HR management. Recent developments with Amazon.com revealed unacceptable practices with warehouse employees being watched by cameras to gauge their hourly performance in order to "encourage" faster/better performance on the shop floor. This has been deemed to exceed ethical measures and we have yet to see how far electronic surveillance will go.

While books have been written about the subject, suffice it to say that a good PE program is satisfactory for the employees and the organization. Some basic rules can help achieve this:

- Clarity of purpose: The PE is designed to guide any of an employee's development, re-classification, pay increase or promotion;
- Clarity of process: The PE program is clearly spelled out in the organization's policies and procedures and understood by all concerned;

- Ethical, ongoing monitoring between PE meetings and reports feeds into the evaluation for that term;
- The PE program is valued by the organization as communicated by senior management with a focus on evaluating the quality of the PEs generated by its supervisors and managers;
- The PEs are customizable to fit the different levels of functioning within the organization;
- The PEs are humanized to include considerations for those personal factors that affect individuals; and,
- The PEs are simple, relevant and easily completed.

With a few simple rules/practices, a PE program can cease to be an unpopular obligation that sporadically pops up leading to unwanted stress by supervisors and employees alike. Moreover, it can effectively contribute to an organization's overall success.

As a former resident of Hamilton, Ontario I used to drive by the DOFASCO steel mill that, in its heyday, proudly displayed a sign that trumpeted "*OUR PRODUCT IS STEEL – OUR BUSINESS IS PEOPLE*". And it is at that level of an organization's persona that a good Performance Evaluation program starts.