



How Do I Breathe New Life Into Performance Evaluations?

Q: I am a training officer for a state agency and soon will conduct a session on performance evaluations. Our supervisors are familiar enough with the process, but I am seeking suggestions to make this training session motivational and fun yet informative, especially as to why employee evaluations are so important. It seems like this is always such a dreaded task. How can I inject new life into an old task?

—Plagued by Routine, training officer, government, Madison, Wisconsin

A: Start by changing your view that performance evaluations are a dreaded task. Instead, educate your supervisors about the potential that appraisals hold for motivating employees to higher levels of productivity and performance.

Performance feedback ideally should be frequent and ongoing, although formal annual evaluations do provide an excellent opportunity to ensure that work objectives and performance expectations are clearly spelled out. This also gives you a window to see if employees and supervisors are in agreement and if their goals are aligned with company objectives. It is important for your supervisors to understand that basic respect for employees is at the heart of the performance discussion, and this respect manifests itself through their interpersonal behavior with those they manage.

The bulk of your training, in fact, should focus on nurturing interpersonal skills in your supervisors, such as communicating effectively and managing conflict. These traits provide the foundation for positive relationships with direct reports, peers and managers at all levels, as well as helping retain valued employees.

Training on interpersonal effectiveness can be fun, motivating and inviting. For example, using role-playing that depicts real-life human resources challenges gives people the chance to practice new skills. Here's how it could work:

Let's say you know an employee will be upset at not receiving an anticipated bonus and positive performance review. Role-playing helps you train supervisors to position the feedback to the employee and work through any potential conflict that may arise. Role-playing also could focus on positive situations, such as a scenario in which a supervisor needs to develop high-potential employees for future assignments. Regardless of the situation, bringing the real world into the classroom enhances learning and gets participants doing instead of sitting and listening.

Equipping managers with effective interpersonal skills is the foundation for solid performance evaluation training. Since it can be interactive and engaging, it enables participants to experience both sides of feedback: how to give constructive feedback, as well as how to receive it.

SOURCE: Maggie Sullivan, executive vice president, [Applied Research Corp.](#), Metuchen, New Jersey, February 16, 2006