

## OASIS Alert

### Human Resources: Boost Employee Performance With Positive Review Elements

#### Praise can be motivational.

Are you making the most of performance appraisals in your agency? If they're just routine paperwork, you're missing an opportunity to help managers and employees identify growth opportunities. Try these tips to overhaul your performance appraisal without adding unnecessary work.

#### Focus On the Positives, Not Just Negatives

One of the biggest mistakes that managers make during performance appraisals is to focus on the areas for improvement or what the employee is doing wrong, rather than highlighting the positive things the employee is doing, says **Bill Repp**, author of the nationally syndicated column *Working Best*, based in Rochester, N.Y. You should match the ratio of good performance to bad performance to the amount of time you spend discussing good performance versus correction, he adds.

If an employee only needs about 20 percent of his performance corrected, "then out of an hour performance appraisal, 48 minutes should be spent praising the employee and talking about all the great things he has done, and only 12 minutes talking about where he can improve," Repp explains.

#### Adopt a Good Appraisal System

If you don't have a good appraisal system, none of your performance appraisals are going to be effective. You should keep these three aspects in mind when setting up your performance appraisals system, Repp says:

**1. A good system requires periodic evaluation.** The performance appraisal should be ongoing, but there should be some formal time set up to review the performance. Don't let managers think seeing an employee at a meeting and saying "You're doing a great job" in passing suffices as a performance appraisal.

**2. Judgments should be made on categories or skills decided in advance between the manager and the employee.** The employee should know ahead of time what is expected of her and what criteria she'll be judged upon.

**3. The communication between the supervisor and the employee must be honest and open.** Without open communication, there can't be any growth.

**Pointer:** Make sure your top management staff stresses that performance appraisals should not be a 15-minute meeting during which the manager just has the employee sign the appraisal. "Top management has to say that you need to be spending an hour or two with that performance process to make sure that the employee knows what's expected and how you're going to be supporting it," Repp says.

You should also make sure every performance appraisal is written out and includes a discussion. Remember to include both positives and negatives in both the written and oral components.

#### Be Firm, but Fair, With Corrective Action

There will be times when an employee needs some sort of corrective action. In such cases, make sure you consistently follow the same corrective process with all employees to ensure fair treatment and make sure you're being reasonable.

**Take notes:** Document the entire process. Encouraging managers to make notes throughout the year about an employee, documenting dates and times of both good and bad performance, will make the performance appraisal process easier and more effective. Good records provide credibility as well. Then you can use that documentation to promote positive corrective action.

**Caution:** When you have to take corrective action, make sure you don't avoid the situation, rely on threats or punishment to motivate improvement, apply rules legalistically, or let personal biases or emotions affect your decisions, Repp warns.