
your bottom line

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Performance evaluation

There is a limit to the amount of work that can be accomplished by any one individual. If you want your studio to grow into a larger, stronger, and more profitable organization, you will be forced to assume the role of manager.

Last month, I discussed several problems you should be aware of when hiring new people. Once you go through the long process of hiring additional staff, your next task is to monitor and evaluate their performance on a continuing basis and reward employees who make significant contributions.

No one likes to be evaluated, and many managers do not enjoy evaluating their staff. Although we expect criticism in life, we become more apprehensive when a formalized on-the-job evaluation takes place. And we feel even more threatened by this when we do not know what to expect.

Many problems can be eliminated by clearly informing your employees that you will periodically conduct formal and informal evaluations. Let them understand that the results will be communicated in a positive manner with suggestions for improvement.

One advantage of conducting employee appraisals is that the process forces managers to clearly specify employee responsibilities and what they determine is "success".

For example, the manager might spell out the number of prints that an in-house printer is expected to produce daily, the amount of waste allowed, and the employee's responsibility for lab maintenance. Even the janitor should know exactly what his job is. If you describe job duties in measurable terms, it is easier for the employees to perform tasks and for management to conduct a meaningful evaluation. As a result, the entire process becomes less threatening and more positively oriented toward greater productivity.

When you hire a new employee, give him or her a detailed handbook that lists the "dos and don'ts" of working with

your company. Also, furnish a written list of general and specific job responsibilities.

New employees should be hired on a probationary basis for up to six months. I recommend an initial "no fault" period of approximately thirty days—during which the employee or company can decide it isn't working and terminate the relationship with no negative repercussions for either party.

After the initial probation period, an evaluation should be conducted at least once a year on each employee. It should measure the degree to which each staff member is meeting specific assignments. Afterward, results should be recorded in writing and discussed with each employee before being placed in their permanent file.

A good evaluation does not always need to guarantee a pay raise. Too many of us think that a pay increase is the only way to reward quality work. While money is necessary for all of us to exist, it is not the only reward that can be used. Words of praise, a general positive regard, a legitimate "thank you," and other desirable working conditions are also powerful reinforcers that cost the company nothing, yet go a long way to increasing employee job satisfaction.

The workplace should, and can, offer the kind of environment that leads to both high employee satisfaction and high-level job performance. Work does not have to be dull and boring.

If you hire the right employees and conduct constructive performance evaluations, you will create a work force that makes your company strong, profitable, and a pleasurable place to work. ■