

# Chapter One

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## Introduction to the Performance Appraisal Process

### **WHAT IS A PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL AND WHY IS IT IMPORTANT?**

Simply put, it is the observation and evaluation of a school employee's work behavior and accomplishments for the purpose of making decisions about the staff member. These decisions may include wage, salary, and benefit determinations; promotion, demotion, transfer, or termination actions; and coaching and counseling, training, or career development options.

There are three basic functions of an effective performance appraisal:

1. To provide adequate feedback to staff members on their performance
2. To serve as an opportunity to communicate face-to-face modifications or changes to existing performance objectives
3. To provide data to administrators so they can evaluate a staff member and judge future job assignments and compensation

The notion of performance appraisal has become an almost universally accepted fact of life in most organizations. It often serves as the basis for other human resource systems, such as salary management, career development, and selection processes. Because of all of these uses for the performance appraisal process, it is increasingly important that school leaders more than ever need to improve their managerial and supervisory skills in such areas as creating individual performance standards, getting employee commitment to performance standards, and conducting interim and end-of-year performance appraisal meetings.

## 2 Performance Appraisals Made Easy

This book was written to help school leaders not only improve their ability in managing their employees' performance, but also to provide staff members with coaching tools that will target their performance deficits. As the first step in any performance review process is to identify the knowledge, skills, and abilities that are required in a specific position, this book provides administrators with unique job descriptions for most support staff and teaching positions. This is not only beneficial for the administrator, but it is enormously important to the employee, as specific performance outcomes are outlined and presented. *Clear, stated behaviors and outcomes for workplace performance must be outlined and discussed if the administrator and the support staff member or teacher can possibly have success in this process. Both parties must have the same mental picture of their performance expectations.*

Self-appraisal forms are also presented for the job-specific responsibilities, as well as self-appraisal forms for more general, interpersonal skill areas that affect how employees interact with colleagues, students, parents, administrators, and others.

After comparing the staff member's expected performance with his or her actual performance, the school administrator can select relevant coaching tools from the book that the staff member can immediately use to help "close the performance gap." These coaching tools provide background information on each performance area, individual development plan forms, and a suggested reading list. The information presented in each area is not designed to be overwhelming, but rather to be practical and ready to use by an employee who needs help in closing a performance gap.

The book also provides school leaders with clear directions on how to conduct initial, interim, and formative coaching and summative performance appraisal meetings, as well as presents templates that immediately provide the employee with beneficial feedback and direction for improvement.

### **Why Is It Necessary to Have a Standardized Process of Implementing Performance Appraisals Throughout an Organization?**

It is necessary to have a standardized process of implementing performance appraisals because it ensures that each individual is judged fairly and keeps discrimination out of promotions and compensation decisions. It also avoids legal challenges that could result from termination or promotion.

Moreover, having a standardized process ensures that job performance expectations are consistent throughout the school district. If employees are transferred from one building to another, they will be more comfortable with what is expected of them. This consistency will also improve staff morale, and this is a key benefit. It is well documented in many motivational studies that people perform better when they are comfortable and enjoy their work. They are able to focus all of their time and energy on the task at hand and not on potential fears or imagined crises. *Remember, teachers teach students skills and competencies and impart knowledge that will be measured on a multitude of tests. Support staff has responsibilities that support the teaching and learning process. If everyone is doing his or her job well, then student learning will be impacted positively.*

### What Is the Process That Enables Change Most Effectively?

Several coaching meetings should be held throughout the entire performance appraisal process. Each meeting should be proactive and should build on each previous discussion and observation.

During each meeting, the administrator should:

- Put the staff member at ease if he or she is nervous. Engage in general conversation until the signs of nervousness subside.
- Review the agenda.
- Emphasize that the purpose of the meeting is to help the staff member work up to his or her potential and to challenge him- or herself.
- Use specific examples when discussing the staff member's behavior and performance.
- Help the staff member outline his or her individual development plan by using the performance appraisal coaching tools.
  - Set short- and long-range goals with the employee.
  - Select strategies and timelines for each goal's implementation.
  - Allocate resources if necessary.
- Emphasize your support for continued improvement and growth.
- Check the staff member's understanding; ask for a summary of key points.
- Make sure the staff member understands performance requirements for the coming period.
- End the meeting positively.

*The purpose of this book is to provide busy school leaders with tools to develop teachers' and support staffs' competencies to ultimately enhance student achievement. These tools are not of uniform length and/or format, as the skills sets they address vary greatly. The tools will most effectively be implemented by using the processes listed in the box below:*

#### **Overview of the Performance Appraisal Process**

1. Review the teacher or support staff member's job description and the summative tool to which he or she will be held accountable.
2. Ask the teacher or support staff member to assess him- or herself on each of the required competencies.
3. Observe the teacher or support staff member's performance (more than one visit—scheduled and unscheduled).
4. Meet with the teacher or support staff member to discuss what was observed and identify gaps in performance.

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## 4 Performance Appraisals Made Easy

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5. Give the teacher or support staff member any of the coaching tools from this book that will address his or her performance needs.
  - Explain the coaching tool thoroughly.
  - Demonstrate how the coaching tool should be completed.
  - Specify the date by which the coaching tool should be completed.
6. Discuss the completed coaching tool with the teacher or support staff member.
7. Schedule other observations to see how the teacher or support staff member has responded to the coaching.
8. Complete the summative performance appraisal tool.
9. Schedule the summative performance appraisal conference.
10. Get the employee's feedback on the effectiveness of the performance appraisal meeting.

*Remember, the supervisor's primary concerns should be:*

- The "what's" and the "when's," not the "how's." The staff member should be the steward of the "how's" in order to maintain his or her sense of control and creativity.
- To grow his or her staff members in order to develop the school's pool of skilled professionals for the future.
- To make training the result of an earnest skill gap analysis or part of the staff member's development and measured performance.

To summarize, the key principles behind the developmental performance appraisal system are:

1. Clear expectations are the backbone of the process.
2. Expectations must be agreed upon by the parties involved.
3. Keep the system as simple as possible.
4. The staff member and the administrator are accountable to one another.
5. They are both also accountable to their internal and external customers.
6. Expectations must have checkpoints throughout the process and must be written on the basis of observable and measurable behaviors.
7. Valid and reliable assessments are a major segment of the process.
8. Staff members are assets to be developed. Continuous learning and growth is a must for every staff member in the organization.
9. All school employees have a vital role in the success of the organization.
10. Development and training must be continually supported to be successful.