HR insights

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Performance Evaluations: Common Supervisor Mistakes

There are a variety of common problems which supervisors must be aware of in evaluating employees. It is essential that you train your supervisors properly to avoid lawsuits and other problems.

1. **Rating inflation**. As a general rule, supervisors give employees inflated performance appraisals because they are afraid that an honest evaluation will damage their working relationship. Evaluations should be comparative and should reflect reality. Inflated performance appraisals give employees a false sense of security, deprive them of an opportunity to improve, and create litigation risks for the company.

2. **Prejudice or bias**. Management should be alert to possible bias when performing evaluations. Bias can be based on race, sex, age, religion, educational accomplishments, or past jobs or any other basis that is not job-related, even if subtle or unintentional. If the employee is a favorite or well-liked, a higher rating than the performance justifies may be given. Reviewers also tend to overlook certain weaknesses that are similar to those of the reviewer.

3. **Failure to use the full rating scale**. Supervisors place employees at the average often because it is the easy thing to do. The midpoint avoids the difficulty of making and justifying a more accurate assessment. Supervisors do not do anyone a favor by not accurately and completely using the rating scale.

4. **Inconsistencies in scoring weighing, or defining factors.** Supervisors frequently fail to understand the rating system. Supervisors often provide comments that are inconsistent with the rating. This creates a credibility problem for employers in litigation suits.

5. **Unrealistic goals/objectives.** Evaluations may reflect the shortcomings of management. If a supervisor establishes unrealistic goals and then negatively evaluates an employee because he or she has not met the goals, the supervisor is creating problems for the company.

6. **Inadequate observation**. Evaluators must be completely familiar with all aspects of an employee's job to ensure a complete and accurate evaluation.

7. **Inappropriate time span for review**. Appraisals should cover the complete span of time since the last evaluation. Supervisors should be familiar with prior evaluations for goal setting and appraisal, but they should not repeatedly look backward and bring up problems that existed in the past, nor should they focus on only recent improvement.

8. **Allotting sufficient time**. The reviewer often does not set aside sufficient time to allow for meaningful performance evaluation. Careful planning and scheduling will enable the reviewer to conduct a more effective evaluation.

9. **Reviews around the holidays**. Don't schedule reviews around the holidays as they frequently lead to grade inflation.

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10. **Lack of comments**. Meaningful and constructive comments are critical if an evaluation must be defended in court and for employee improvement.

11. **Comments that are misleading**. It's much easier for a supervisor to say that an employee is "improving" than to say that the employee's performance is not at the expected level. The evaluation should say explicitly that performance is substandard. Evaluations should not explain deficiencies, but rather identify them and establish the basis for improvement.

12. **Too much or too little detail**. Find an appropriate balance. A general comment begs for supporting details. Being too specific makes it seem like the employee is being picked on.

13. **Acting like a psychologist/ psychiatrist**. The main purpose of an evaluation is to identify the deficiency and to develop a plan to correct it. Employee assistance programs may provide an opportunity for the employee to address problems outside of work that are affecting workplace behaviors and performance.

14. Focusing on the employee instead of the issue. The focus should be directly on the problem, not on the person.

15. **Not following through**. Reviewers often do not follow through with suggested corrective action, making the performance evaluation ineffective.