

When job reviews get raves

by Stewart Ain

Published: September 1, 2010

Business coach Andrea Feinberg recently sat in on the performance review of a saleswoman for an industrial equipment company.

The employer had asked Feinberg to assess his employees and see how performance could be improved through the discovery of their strengths. In this particular evaluation, the employer knew his employee wanted to develop her own relationships with potential clients, Feinberg remembered. That set the tone of the appraisal, with the result being the employer said she could make her own appointments to nurture new prospects.

“The employee was thrilled because it was a new challenge for her,” Feinberg said.

A happy ending to a process often viewed with dread from both sides of the table.

Feinberg, president of Port Jefferson Station’s Coaching Insight, said reviews don’t have to be painful. If used properly, they give managers opportunities for feedback that helps shape an employee’s goals.

“They can be invaluable, but too many people - employers and employees - look upon them as a waste of time and a meaningless exercise,” she added.

A recent survey developed by OfficeTeam, a national staffing firm, found nine out of 10 HR managers surveyed believe formal reviews improve job performance. Sixty percent of the managers said their evaluations are done annually and about 18 percent conduct them quarterly.

Rob Basso, president of Advantage Payroll Services in Freeport, finds reviews so important he hired a business coach to teach his managers the art of the performance appraisal review.

“Some business owners might think that it’s too costly, but you can’t afford not to do it right,” Basso explained.

If reviews are done poorly they tend to kill positive motivation in the employee being reviewed, when the opposite is the goal, he added.

With reviews, timing is everything. Basso believes reviews are best done several times a year, ensuring an employee is on track to meet the company’s and their own goals.

It’s also not just the time of year. Basso said meetings are most productive when conducted before lunch when people are most alert. And it’s best when two managers attend so that someone who doesn’t have day-to-day contact with the employee can provide different insights and perhaps act as a referee between the employee and his or her manager.

“It’s a lot more complicated than some people believe,” he added. “It’s not just a piece of paper with some boxes to check off about performance. The meetings between employees and managers can last well over an hour. Reviews of senior managers could take a half-day.”

That’s overkill, according to Lloyd Van Horn, general manager of the Montauk Yacht Club. Van Horn has one performance review for his 140 employees annually and believes assessments should take 15 minutes or less.

“I would hope that if my managers are being forthright, there is good communication with the employees,” Van Horn said. “Anything being discussed in the review should be a verification of their performance and should not come as a surprise.”

Too often a performance review is just a rehash of everything an employee did wrong in the two weeks before the review, he added.

In addition, Van Horn encourages his managers to compliment employees when they do good work.

“Good employees have the most anxiety because they often never get feedback,” he said. “That is the surest way to lose good staff.”

The [U.S. Department of Labor](#) backs Van Horn up, reporting that almost two out of three employees leave their jobs citing a lack of appreciation.

Not only do employees sweat reviews, employers often despise the whole process because of paperwork mountains to climb. The Teachers Federal Credit Union in Farmingville has eased the ordeal by automating the process.

“Some of our people have to look at a lot of reviews - one person has to look at 300 - and the paperwork shuffle made the process inefficient because reviews could be lost or misplaced,” said C.J. Meyers, CFO at Teachers Federal. Now managers write an evaluation online, send it to the supervisor for review and then e-mail it to the employee.

“Employees are happy with it,” Meyers said. “The human resources department reports to me and we know when everyone’s review has been done. The reviews are then stored in a database and the manager can look at the review the following year without having to dig through paperwork. And in an organization this size, as individuals move from department to department their reviews go along with them.”