

EMPLOYEE RELATIONS

Issue 01

January 2002

Welcome

Welcome to the first issue of the Employee and Labor Relations Notes. These notes will be coming to you, the supervisors and managers of REE, on a bi-monthly basis. Our intent is to provide you with practical guidance and information to help you perform your job. It is our hope that you will keep these notes and as they continue you will have a Supervisory Notebook of guidance in Employee and Labor Relations, Ethics, and Cooperative Resolution. Each issue will have a new topic of interest with articles related to that topic. At the end of the notes you will find your servicing Employee Relations team with their phone numbers and e-mail addresses. Please call them if you want to discuss anything presented in the notes or have issues you need assistance on. If you cannot reach your team, please contact me on 301-504-1355. I always look forward to talking with supervisors and managers of REE.

Vicki Hanbury
Chief, Employee Relations Branch, HRD

Conducting Performance Reviews

Performance reviews provide an opportunity for employees and supervisors to discuss individual performance over the last year or so. They are so beneficial because they provide a great opportunity to develop a positive working relationship and improve productivity. They remind supervisors to set aside a chunk of time to do some important things, such as giving feedback to employees to let them know where they stand, getting first-hand information about what is going on in their organization, clarifying and communicating organizational goals, giving employees

In theory, it seems easy to distinguish the difference between performance and conduct. In practice, it can be much more difficult. For example, let's say you have an employee who has a rating element for planning and organizing work, and the standard requires timely completion of work and

some formal recognition for jobs well done, and recognizing and dealing with performance problems.

So, if performance reviews are so wonderful, why do supervisors often feel that doing them is one of the most challenging and intimidating parts of their jobs? Why do they cause so many headaches and so much heartburn? The truth is, supervisors know how important performance ratings are, they know how significantly they can impact employee motivation and morale, and they know how closely ratings and awards are related. At the same time, supervisors are sometimes confused about who should be rated, what really counts as performance, what kinds of things they should consider, how they can really find out how an employee has performed, and how they should conduct the performance review discussion. While we won't be able to address all of the concerns in this newsletter, hopefully, addressing some of the confusing issues will help supervisors feel a little more comfortable with the task at hand.

The Difference Between Performance and Conduct

When doing performance ratings, supervisors should focus on just that - performance. Performance is the level at which an employee performs the essential duties of his or her position as defined in the performance standards. The performance standards define the performance expectations. In other words, performance is how well an employee is doing his or her work. It differs from conduct, which is an employee's behavior, bearing, and attitude as reflected in his or her observable actions. Conduct is whether or not an employee obeys the written or unwritten rules of the workplace.

meeting deadlines. This employee is frequently absent and late for work. As a result, this employee fails to complete his work in a timely manner and frequently misses deadlines. So, the employee fails the rating element and you are dealing with a performance problem - right? Well, maybe not. If the employee is

not completing work on time and missing deadlines because of his frequent absences, it is more likely that you are dealing with a conduct issue. If you, as the supervisor are approving his leave, you cannot hold him accountable for doing work that he was not at work to do because he was on approved leave. If you address the conduct issue, that is, frequent absences and tardiness, the issue of not completing work on time and missing deadlines may be corrected as well. However, if you address the conduct issue, and the employee is still frequently missing deadlines, then you may have a performance issue to deal with.

When faced with a problem that is not evident whether it is a performance problem or a conduct issue, it sometimes helps to ask yourself, **“Is it that the employee can’t do it, or that the employee won’t do it?”** If the answer is the employee can’t do it, you most likely have a performance problem; if the answer is the employee won’t do it, consider it a conduct problem. If you have difficulty figuring it out, call your servicing Employee Relations Specialist to discuss the situation and help you decide.

Providing Specific, Accurate, and Useful Feedback

Effective preparation is the key to providing specific, accurate, and useful feedback in a performance review. The first step is to review the employee’s position description, elements and standards, most recent formal review, and examples of work products. The next step is to gather feedback from the employee’s customers and colleagues. Then, get feedback from the employee; many supervisors ask for employees to provide a list of their accomplishments. Once you have gathered all the necessary information, it’s time to determine the employee’s contributions and potential. Ask yourself, “Has this person met or exceeded the performance expectations of the job, as defined by the elements and standards? What value does this person add to my organization? How and where do I anticipate this person will fit into future work?” Ask yourself these questions in the context of organizational goals and priorities, and the employee’s performance goals, objectives, ideas, and needs. The next step is to help the employee prepare. Better yet, help all your employees prepare by addressing the subject at the next staff meeting. Let your employees know well in advance when you plan to have the performance review discussions to give them plenty of time to prepare. Help them prepare by reinforcing the importance of employee input, giving an overview of the process, emphasizing positive outcomes, encouraging employees to raise concerns, suggesting things for them to think about or bring to the discussion, encouraging

an investment of time in preparation, and offering support and assistance.

All the preparation in the world won’t eliminate all the anxieties associated with performance reviews. But proper preparation will help to make performance reviews what they should be - an opportunity to share ideas, improve productivity, and focus on individual and organizational goals.