

Excerpts from:

## **SUPERVISOR'S GUIDE TO EFFECTIVE PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL**

By Forest C. Benedict and Cynthia Smith

Central to the development of an effective performance appraisal process is a clear statement of the work responsibilities and requirements written in a controlled and systematic language.

Many organizations have job descriptions that describe various dimensions of a position (e.g., supervision received and/or exercised over others, the nature and extent of contacts with others, budget responsibilities). You are not expected to rewrite or replace the job description, but rather to use the information from the job description to develop clear, concise task statements that can be used in the performance appraisal process.

The specific objective of this guide is to provide you with the knowledge of the basic elements of descriptive task statements and the skills to write task statements. This knowledge and these skills will help you communicate more effectively and objectively about work and make it easier to develop performance standards.

### **WRITING PERFORMANCE STANDARDS**

As a manager you are responsible for achieving results. It is not enough for your employees to be busy. You must see to it that the work performed by employees reporting to you is contributing directly to the department's objectives.

Performance standards are the criteria against which the results of an employee's work are assessed. Specification of performance standards is essential from both the employee's and the department's point of view.

The employee needs to have a clear idea of the basis upon which his or her performance will be evaluated. By having advance knowledge of the results expected from the work, an employee can evaluate whether or not his or her work is satisfactory. The self-evaluation enables the employee to keep his or her performance within acceptable limits.

From the department's point of view, performance standards are necessary because they are the means by which the department, through supervision, attempts to ensure that the individual employee's work results are properly coordinated with department objectives. All tasks performed in a department should contribute to its objectives.

### **WHAT SHOULD PERFORMANCE STANDARDS EVALUATE?**

Performance standards should evaluate the following two areas:

- Behavior - actions the employee performs.
- Results - the outcome of the employee's actions.

Look at the **key responsibility** below:

**Answers questions, provides information to callers by referring to order sheets in order to clarify of correct information concerning orders** (the activity of behavior described in the task is answering questions and providing information to callers).

Examples of **performance standards** which might be appropriate for this activity include:

- The employee's telephone manner is pleasant and courteous during conversation.
- Telephone is answered on or before third ring.
- No more than one caller complaint per month is received relative to uncourteous employee telephone manners.

Examples of **observed results** could include:

- Information provided to callers is correct and complete.
- Follow-up all cases where additional information is required to answer or clarify caller's question within one day.

It is important to keep in mind that an employee may perform the actions of a task in a satisfactory manner but not accomplish the desired results (and vice versa). In other words, the employee may provide information in a courteous manner, but provide incorrect information. Likewise, the employee may provide the correct information, but provide it in an

unpleasant manner. By developing both behavior and result performance standards, it is more likely that the task will be performed in a satisfactory manner.

## TYPES OF PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Performance standards can be categorized into two different types:

▸ **Numeric standards** provide a quantifiable objective measure about which no (or very little) interpretation is required.

Examples of numeric performance standards:

- Telephone is answered on or before third ring.
- No more than one complaint per month about services.

▸ **Descriptive standards** communicate nuances of meaning that are difficult to measure or detect. They are non-specific and subjective. However, they do serve a purpose by communicating general expectations. The employee is required to provide his or her own interpretations of what is actually meant. Many times the dialogue between you and the employee helps to develop a clearer understanding of descriptive standards.

Examples of descriptive performance standards:

- Telephone is answered promptly and courteously.
- Few callers complain to supervisor about services

A combination of descriptive and numeric standard is usually desirable for individual tasks. Neither kind of standard is superior to the other; instead they are complementary. Both kinds of standards have strengths and weaknesses and the use of both descriptive and numeric standards helps to counteract the weaknesses of the other.

## KEY POINTS TO KEEP IN MIND

- Performance standards should evaluate both what the employee does (behavior) and the result (output).
- The most effective standards are a combination of descriptive and numerical standards that have been arrived at by the employee and the manager together.
- When developing performance standards, think in terms of quality, quantity, time and cost effectiveness.
- Performance standards should differentiate between satisfactory and unsatisfactory performance.
- Performance standards should be realistic and achievable.
- Performance should be observable and measurable.
- A good way to start developing performance standards is by saying "an employee will have done a good job when..."

## EXAMPLES OF PERFORMANCE STANDARDS

Task	Repairs door hardware in order to return it to working order.
Standards	Repairs door within three days of receipt of job order. Logs all jobs in job completion book.
Task	Compiles/types statistical information for departmental reports in order to prepare typewritten report for review.
Standards	Statistical information is accurate and complete. No errors are found in the report.
Task	Takes patient's vital signs (temperature, pulse rate, respiration) and records the information on patient's ward chart in order to maintain an up-to-date health record of patient.
Standards	Vital signs are recorded accurately in appropriate patient's chart and are legible. Vital signs are taken accordingly to training procedures received from nursing staff. Any unusual vital sign read is reported to supervisor.