

Secrets of Success: Performance Appraisal

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Out with the old year; in with the new...and since annual performance reviews should be more about moving forward than looking back, what better time than now as we step into 2010 to put this task on your "to-do" list? I'll let you in on a little secret...*You're not the only one that doesn't like to conduct performance reviews.* Many times, they are looked at as nothing more than criticism and confrontation. And true, they can be uncomfortable. Some think of them as just a waste of time because nothing really gets accomplished as a result. No, you're not alone if you think, "Why should I make a big deal out of this? I'll just avoid the drama and give my staff their raise; that's all they want from the review anyway." There is so much wrong with that statement – I don't even know where to begin! And yet, when has that ever stopped me? Here are some guiding principles to attach to your performance reviews that can prove to be helpful:

1. Don't stick your head in the sand. Communication is vital and your staff not only want, but they *depend* on your verbal guidance and evaluation. AND...as their manager, you are expected to deliver. Deliberate avoidance of their good and bad behavior/activities only translates into feelings of apathy, confusion, dissatisfaction and low morale for them.
2. If you go into the meeting dreading it or believing it is a "big deal"- it will be. If instead you approach it like the proactive management tool that it is, it will do what it is intended to do - help develop your staff and increase their performance.
3. While you may only conduct formal performance evaluations annually, keep in mind that periodic reviews are just as important so be sure to routinely monitor, observe and document staff performance all year round.
4. Staff performance should be judged using specific objectives and fact-based measurements involving not only basic job skills (e.g., knowledge and technical abilities) but also on their soft skills such as problem solving, organization, time management, disposition, attitude, dependability and adaptability, initiative, decision making, communication, attendance and professionalism.
5. Specific examples should be used to support your judgments and try not to be accusatory. For example, instead of saying "You don't pay attention to detail!" try rephrasing it this way: "*Mary, I don't feel you pay much attention to detail because the last three patient entries you made in the log book were misspelled. Here, let me show you.*" (Produce a copy of the errors.) Also, never leave the criticism hanging...in the above example, you might ask, "*What can we do in the future, Mary to prevent this from happening again?*" By opening the dialogue and soliciting suggestions, staff will be more receptive to changing their behavior and avoid future recurrences.
6. Likewise, I always recommend that staff also do their homework by similarly documenting their contributions to the practice. Many times, they succeed in developing new procedures or systems that unless immediately celebrated or acknowledged, go unnoticed. These should be brought to the doctor's attention during the review.
7. A review should never always be *just* about the employer's wants, needs and expectations and neither should it be a "dumping ground" for wrongdoings. It should encourage a positive exchange of information between both parties. Staff should feel free to ask questions, voice concerns, speak of their achievements and even comment on their own performance. An open-door policy will allow the review to be conducted honestly and with purpose.
8. If your program is "ratings-based" (linking a numeric system to various degrees of performance) and you are able to support each with examples, merit raises can be easily determined. I believe that employers share the opinion that if staff have put forth the effort and show improvement from one year to the next, they should be rewarded accordingly; however, it is when they just "expect" it (*regardless of their performance*) that causes resentment in issuing raises. If the latter is a reality for you, doctor, it's only because staff have been trained that way! **(For a complimentary ratings-based performance review, please email lynn@soshms.com.)**
9. Make sure your performance scale and goals are realistic and attainable. Be careful not to set your employee standards so high that no one can even come close to meeting your expectations.
10. Compare apples to apples. It is not fair to compare receptionist duties to clinical podiatric medical assistant duties and vice versa when they obviously require different skill sets.

Happy and Healthy 2010 to all my readers and their staff!

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