

# Invest in success

How to boost your bottom line with meaningful performance evaluations **Interviewed by Elizabeth Grace Saunders**

**A**n effective and efficient performance evaluation process has the potential to not only spur productivity but also boost employee morale.

“When done properly, performance evaluations can be effective planning tools and provide important feedback for all involved,” says Carol Brinkley, vice president of work force services and consumer affairs at Tampa Bay WorkForce Alliance (TBWA). “Promoting an attitude of progress can help your employees feel like they have achievable goals.”

*Smart Business* asked Brinkley about the impact of performance evaluations and how to make them relevant, productive and meaningful for your staff.

## Why do many people have a negative view of performance evaluations?

Performance evaluations can be intimidating, but they don't have to be negative for employees or managers. Most employees want and need feedback, but they also desire to be engaged in the process and receive update reports throughout the year. An issue far too many managers have is not asking for input from the employee prior to drafting the evaluation. Managers should communicate with staff on an ongoing basis and solicit their input on goals, accomplishments and areas they have improved. They should also ensure that important issues relating to performance are addressed throughout the year to give employees the opportunity to modify weak areas. An employee who hears of the things he or she could have done better during the prior six months in a single review can be overwhelmed and discouraged.

## What can be the consequences of a weak performance review process?

A poor performance review process can affect the bottom line. Lost time, turnover and low morale can stem from a stymied evaluation system. Often, high performers require less attention. However, they too deserve positive feedback to feel valued and appreciated. On the other hand, employees who need more coaching throughout the year may have lower productivity and feel unable to meet your expectations. Constant communication is



**Carol Brinkley**

Vice president of work force services and consumer affairs  
Tampa Bay WorkForce Alliance

essential to building trust and building employee morale and confidence.

## How can employers make evaluations more relevant and productive?

Be substantive and qualitative. Giving general feedback does not present a clear picture of your expectations. Use specific examples to illustrate your points when identifying areas of improvement and when praising them. Managers should incorporate time regularly for recording employees' successes and track weak areas. When the time comes for a performance review, you will have had a good balance of successes and areas of improvement or goals to discuss. To sound cliché, this is an area where honesty is the best policy. If you are honest about the positives and negatives all along, a factual review will serve to coach and motivate an employee.

## How often should employers complete performance evaluations?

Performance evaluations are meant to provide a meaningful overall assessment of an

employee's performance and ensure everyone is on the same track. At a minimum, evaluations should be done semiannually. Performance management, however, is an ongoing communicative effort between management and employee. There should be a constant dialogue that links expectations and ongoing feedback with coaching, development planning and follow-up.

## Should promotions and incentives be tied to these reviews?

Succeeding in today's competitive marketplace requires buy-in from all employees. Incentives aren't a cure-all, but they incite staff to meet specific goals and business objectives. Performance reviews are a helpful tool to methodically approach promotions and incentives that are tied to goal setting. Remember that if an employee is excelling, managers don't have to wait for their review to reward them through a pay increase or promotion. There should be opportunities throughout the year for motivating and rewarding good performance.

## Any tips for reducing the time spent on reviews?

Reviews are perhaps the most challenging task for managers. Keep notes throughout the year of accomplishments as they happen. Remember to give your feedback to staff on a regular basis, positive and negative. There should be a continuous loop of planning, coaching and providing feedback. Critique a project as it is unfolding instead of waiting for the end result. Provide encouragement when performance seems to be less than expected and set clear goals and expectations so that when the employee is not on track, he or she can understand a less favorable critique. The semiannual review should merely be a process of compiling and summarizing previous observations made to the employee. This process will save time to draft the review, offer more feedback and eliminate surprises. <<

**CAROL BRINKLEY** is vice president of work force services and consumer affairs at Tampa Bay WorkForce Alliance. Reach her at (813) 740-4680 or [brinkleyc@workforcetampa.com](mailto:brinkleyc@workforcetampa.com).

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