

Higher Performance

How to improve appraisals and demonstrate performance improvement as an outcome.

BY MARK HEYMANN

Performance appraising is surely not new to the hospitality industry or any other kind of business. Everyone, regardless of business, believes that employee satisfaction is a fundamental key to success. Appraising performance is one of the means that an organization has to heighten satisfaction among all those who collectively comprise this critical business “partner.”

So the question becomes: Why is this process that has been around for so many years so challenging and, at times, so ineffective? I think the answer is multi-faceted and impacted by key issues:

1. Inconsistency/randomness of the process
2. Lack of measurable outcomes
3. Discomfort on the part of the appraiser



4. Lack of specific ties to the company’s mission
5. Lack of linkage to the appraisee’s specific responsibilities
6. Perception of a lack of objectivity

If one is able to address each of these issues and then apply the solution to the operating environment, the appraisal process will not only be enhanced, but also be made more effective.

Unfortunately, this space does not allow for too great of an in depth analysis of each of these issues, so I will focus on clarifying the issues and making recommendations on solutions. I think that each individual reading about these issues will agree with some or all of the premises, and by focusing on those specifics will be able to create organizational improvements. Applying all of the recommendations will heighten success.

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1. INCONSISTENCY/RANDOMNESS

■ **SITUATION:** When you look at most organizations the appraisal process consists of a 30-, 60- and 90-day review upon hiring and then an annual review. In between each annual review, feedback is ad hoc and frequently focused on a negative event. Of course, there’s the occasional slap on the back, but this surely can’t substitute for a formalized review. What this creates is an environment where the employee must

“guess” about his or her performance. Also, the annual review mostly focuses on the prior few months of performance and not the full period of time, one year.

■ **SOLUTION:** Implement a quarterly review with a performance assessment tool that is used throughout the quarter. In hotels, we have had a room inspection process for housekeeping for years, and rooms are reviewed daily. This has been reduced in frequency, but this is the only feedback/appraisal system that has been in use to meet the need of more frequent feedback. All other areas can implement short-term feedback tools by simply identifying key service issues in each area. Restaurants, for example, can put together a tool that identifies eight to 10 key steps of service that can be observed. The manager can complete four to five per month for each team member, giving immediate feedback each day when the review has been done, and then use the 12 to 15 assessments as part of a quarterly review. Each area of a property can use this same process. The full set of annual assessments can then become a key component of the annual review process and ensure that the annual result more fairly evaluates the employee’s full year of service.

2. LACK OF MEASURABLE OUTCOMES

■ **SITUATION:** We complete appraisals under our present structures and don’t measurably improve our business results. The appraisal can’t be an end unto itself, which it frequently is. The human resources office tells us we have to review certain

individuals this month and we go through the motions. This meets the goal of completing appraisals, but the questions become: Are they effective, what is the real outcome and at what cost?

■ **SOLUTION:** What we need to know to determine if the appraisal process is successful

AN EXAMPLE OF A PERIODIC EVALUATION USING ADVISED CRITERIA

PERIODIC
EMPLOYEE SERVICE EVALUATION

LAUNDRY ATTENDANT

NAME: _____ SHIFT: _____ DATE: _____

Is employee’s performance consistent with the achievement of the resort and department mission statements?

RESORT MISSION: To provide a wholesome family environment where all may find beauty, relaxation, inspiration and a better understanding of the living world.	LAUNDRY MISSION: To provide safe, reliable laundry service to each department and to return clean, bright, sanitary, and neat linen in a timely, cost efficient manner.	
TASK	POINTS	COMMENTS
Cleaning The Dryers	5	_____
Cleaning The Ironer	5	_____
Loading The CBW	5	_____
Operating The Dryer	5	_____
Operating The Piece Folder	5	_____
Operating The Washers	5	_____
Sorting Laundry	5	_____
Waxing The Ironer	5	_____
TOTAL	_____	_____

MONTHLY GOAL: _____ GROWTH GOAL: _____

EMPLOYEE FEEDBACK: _____

LAST MONTH’S GOALS COMPLETE: YES NO

SUPERVISOR: _____ EMPLOYEE: _____

DEPARTMENT HEAD: _____

is what changes in the business would we expect to observe? Some possible scenarios could include increases in guest satisfaction, cleaner kitchens, reduced silver and glass costs, increases in revPAR and ADR, improved food costs, increased productivity, reduced employee turnover, lower absenteeism and improved bottom line. These are just a few examples. Each

department should identify two to four outcomes that are measurable. An organization should establish a baseline, which should be based on historical performance, and measure impact on a quarterly basis. The baseline should be upgraded every 18 to 24 months. This will allow enough time for it to have an

impact and to continue to motivate the entire team.

3. DISCOMFORT ON THE PART OF THE APPRAISER

■ **SITUATION:** People don’t like to deliver bad news. Just observe the growth in the use of e-mail instead of communicating face to face. Further, I believe that appraisals are viewed as necessary but without any real outcomes. Intrinsically, we know that

appraising performance is important, but it never fits into our schedules and giving effective feedback, for most people, is a learned skill.

■ **SOLUTION:** To address this issue, an organization should implement performance-appraisal training as a key skill development for all supervisory and management staff. Part of the challenge is that organizations deliver some workshops but don’t have a self-learned course for new management, so mass training occurs but then six months later a new manager emerges and the training is not done. Further, don’t assume that just because an individual has been a manager in another organization that he or she has acquired the feedback skill. As part of the process for any new hire, appraising should be learned and/or refreshed. Additionally, the use of a periodic feedback system will make formalized feedback a more regular process, and regularity helps to develop comfort and ease of feedback delivery.

4. LACK OF SPECIFIC TIES BETWEEN THE APPRAISAL AND COMPANY’S MISSION

■ **SITUATION:** Organizations spend significant sums of money developing and imparting mission and value statements. They frequently look great in nice frames on the wall but, unfortunately, are not a living part of the business. Some companies even put these value statements on the back of their business cards, but not all employees have business cards. If a mission is to achieve its objective, then it should get regular focus and be a part of discussions that

relate to how it will be attained. The mission's attainment also becomes a key metric in appraising the overall organization's performance, which means that each part of the organization must contribute to the process.

■ **SOLUTION:** Put the mission statement on the top of the appraisal form and relate that in the review process to how an individual's performance/decisions contribute to the attainment of the

organization's mission. This will not only enhance the enlivening of the mission, but also form a basis for continual recommitment to the mission.

5. LACK OF LINKAGE TO THE APPRAISEE'S SPECIFIC RESPONSIBILITIES

■ **SITUATION:** The appraisal document is a standard form that applies to everyone; however, while some criteria

are universal, the steward has differing issues, for example, than the front desk associate. The use of a single standard form makes it more challenging to ensure that an appraisal relates to an individual's job responsibilities, reducing the effectiveness of the process.

■ **SOLUTION:** To make the appraisal process more relevant, a significant portion should relate specifically to the individual's job responsibilities. Therefore, each job class should have its own appraisal form with the unique job task related performance metrics. Additionally, if the periodic feedback process is put in place, the annual appraisal document should be able to incorporate the periodic results.

6. PERCEPTION OF A LACK OF OBJECTIVITY

■ **SITUATION:** Because the human resources department usually drives the appraisal process, the feedback is frequently rushed and not founded on performance facts. This leads to reviews that lack objective performance criteria and therefore increase the perception of conflict between the parties involved in the appraisal. The lack of objectivity reduces the appraisal's effectiveness, can be demotivating and frequently has a direct relationship to changes in the appraisee's income, which creates a new level of dissatisfaction.

■ **SOLUTION:** To solve this problem, managers should simply implement numbers 1, 2, 4 and 5 as noted previously. If an organization establishes job-class related criteria that is periodically reviewed, then the appraisal process, not only annual but also throughout the year, will be viewed as objective, and positive performance results will be forthcoming. ■

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