

Food for Thought

Tips on Conducting Effective Employee Performance Evaluations



The following is another in a series of articles designed to educate employees about common HR issues and encourage open discussion among employees and supervisors.

One of the most difficult aspects of conducting a performance appraisal is the need to provide an employee with feedback regarding unsatisfactory performance. Just as difficult is the role of the employee in receiving negative information. The way a supervisor handles this potential confrontation and an employee's reaction can mean the difference between a successful outcome and a total failure to move towards improved performance.

If an employee who is being evaluated accepts constructive feedback and agrees to work on the problems and improve performance, then there are usually few negative repercussions. However, if the confrontation leads to an angry exchange and hurt feelings, the opportunity to correct the problems has probably been lost and instead of improvement, the performance could get worse.

Instead of confronting someone directly with criticism, it is often better to allow the course of the conversation to flow towards the negative behavior. By letting the facts emerge during the evaluation process, it is more likely that an employee with problems will recognize them on their own.

A good way to begin such a conversation is to ask open-ended questions that encourage the employee to identify their own performance problems. Instead of accusations, the person conducting the evaluation should allow the employee to talk about their

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Every action we take, everything we do, is either a victory or defeat in the struggle to become what we want to be.

— Anne Byrhhe, US Educator

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own impressions of their performance. For example, if an employee is reporting late to work, a supervisor in a confrontational mode might say:

Your tardiness is unacceptable. You'll have to improve it.

A better way to handle this might be to say:
You arrived late to work eight times this month. What can you tell me about this?
The technique is to calmly present the evidence (resisting the temptation to label it as good or bad) and then ask the employee to comment. In many cases, with just a gentle nudge from the supervisor here and there, an employee with problems will admit that weaknesses do exist, especially if they do not feel accused of anything or feel forced to admit something they would rather not admit. If an evaluator can get an employee to the stage of

voluntary admission, half the battle is won.

This approach is more likely to promote discussion and agreement on the need for change. It is also more effective than techniques that rely on "charge and counter-charge" which tend to promote adversarial relationships that lead to denial and resentment.

The most powerful aspect of this process is that employees are more willing to accept personal "ownership" of problems that have been self-identified. This sense of ownership provides an effective basis for stimulating change and development.

In providing any feedback—especially negative feedback—appraisers should be willing and able to support their opinions with specific and clear examples.



Edit or Update Your W4/Direct Deposit Information Online



Employees are now able to update or edit their own W4 and Direct Deposit information online via HRConnect! Simply log onto HRConnect

at: <https://sso.tamu.edu> and click on the Payroll Data Tab.

Employee's can update their W4 information by clicking on the edit button under Federal Income Tax Withholding Details. Instructions

will be displayed for updating exemptions, extra withholding, or other information as needed.

On the same Payroll Data Tab, Direct Payroll Deposit Detail information is available to employees by clicking the edit button. Please remember to have your bank's routing and account number on hand to process any updates. You also have the choice of designating deposit into either your checking or savings account.

Supervisor Training

Human Resources is hosting the following training sessions designed especially for supervisors. Each of these will be conducted online via Centra Symposium:

April 21	Building an Inclusive Environment
April 28	Recruiting
May 5	Interviewing
May 12	Hiring
May 19	Performance Management
May 26	Performance Review

For more information on attending a Friday Online via Centra Symposium, please go to http://extensionlearning.tamu.edu/PDFs/FRIDAY-ONLINE2005_06.pdf

Additional information is available on the Extension Information Technology website at <http://eit.tamu.edu/Centra/Centramenu.html>

— Jennifer Humphries

What lies behind us and what lies before us are tiny matters compared to what lies within us.

— Ralph Waldo Emerson

You Can Quit Smoking and Your Insurance Plan May Help

If your New Year's resolution was to stop smoking and you failed, then you already know how hard it can be. Nicotine is addictive and it may take many tries before you successfully quit. Every time you quit and start again, you are learning what works for you and what doesn't. The uses of proven cessation treatments can double your chances of success.

Several of the TAMUS group insurance providers offer programs that may be of help in your desire to stop smoking.

- PharmaCare, the prescription drug provider for the A&M Care health plans, provides prescription products for smoking cessation. You must receive authorization from PharmaCare to participate in the pro-

gram. For more information, call 866/935-5433

- Scott and White Health Plan, offers reimbursements for some smoking cessation products. Call Scott and White at 800/791-8777 for specific details.
- CIGNA dental plans offer discounts through their Healthy Rewards program. Log in to <http://www.myCiGNA.com> or call the toll-free number on the back of your dental card.

For more information visit:

www.smokefree.gov or call 1-800-QUIT-NOW for assistance in quitting.

— Jan Kyles

New Discount Hearing Aid Program Available

A new discount hearing aid program is available through BlueCross BlueShield of Texas (BCBSTX), giving A&M Care participants 30%-60% off the retail price on digital hearing aids. The program, administered by TruHearing, also includes free hearing screenings, hearing aid fitting and related services through TruHearing's provider network.

To take advantage of free services and discounts, the participant must use a TruHearing network provider. Currently, TruHearing has no network providers in the Bryan/College Station area (the nearest providers are in Houston and Georgetown). BCBSTX has been asked to request that TruHearing add Bryan/College Station providers to its network.

Prices on hearing aids are:

- \$995 for TruHearing Basic (100% digital, two channels and two program memories). Suggested retail of \$1,595.
- \$1,495 for TruHearing Medallion (100% digital, seven channels, four automatic gain controls, voice processing, feedback cancellation and three program memories). Suggested retail of \$3,595.
- \$1,995 for TruHearing Ultra (100% digital, 14 channel, six automatic gain controls,

feedback cancellation, automatic environmental management, up to four memories). Suggested retail of \$4,755.

To access the program, A&M Care participants can call TruHearing toll-free at (877) 882-2020 Monday through Friday between 8 a.m. and 8 p.m. A customer service representative will locate a network provider closest to the participant's area and schedule an appointment. The participant presents his/her BCBSTX ID card at the time of the appointment and receives the discount at the time of purchase. To receive the discount, the participant must purchase hearing aids from the provider who performs the hearing test. No claim forms are necessary.

The participant's children, parents and grandparents can also use this program even if they are not enrolled in the A&M Care plan. However, the participant must accompany the family member to the TruHearing provider and present his/her health plan ID card.

All A&M System employees, including A&M Care participants, will still have access to American Hearing Aid Associates (AHAA), the A&M System's discount hearing aid program.

— Jan Kyles



Tact is the ability to describe others as they see themselves.
— Abraham Lincoln



All Aboard the Learning Central Line!

Monthly TTVN training continues along with other training opportunities via other avenues such as Centra. Our TTVN training sessions will continue to be the last Tuesday of the month, except for December, which will be moved to an earlier time due to the holidays.

The schedule for the December 2005 and the winter/spring 2006 is tentatively set as follows:

- Mar, 28 — TimeTraq Training
- Apr. 25 — TrainTraq for Unit Contacts – how to make it work for your employees
- May 30 — Approaches to Supervision
- Jun. 27 — To be determined
- Aug. 29 — To be determined

Friday's Online

- Mar. 3 — Being an Effective Educator: Methods of Learning and Teaching
- Mar. 10 — Being an Effective Educator: Enhancing Learning Through Media and Other Teaching Aids
- Mar. 24 — PowerPoint Tips and Tricks
- Mar. 31 — Distance Education: Development Tools

Come join us for these great TTVN and Friday Online sessions!

AND . . . Don't Forget that there are saved training presentations on Centra, so check them out as they are ready when you are!

-- Bob Hensz



Compliance Review Team

The Texas A&M Agriculture Compliance Review Team continues to visit units both on- and off-campus to assist units with preparation for their eventual audits. Some of the items commonly found during the HR review are: I-9s kept by the unit; hiring file materials included in personnel files; payroll rosters included in personnel files which lists employee information for a large number of employees; performance evaluations that are late or were not done last year; and PADs that are not reviewed by both the employee and supervisor and annotated with their initials and date. In addition we have discovered

that many of you are maintaining a payroll type file which contains materials either duplicated in the main personnel file or materials that should be consolidated in the main personnel file, such as training certificates. Remember that the personnel file consists of the main personnel file with the PADs, signed offer letters, performance evaluations, etc., PLUS, payroll files and confidential files. Checklists for the personnel and recruiting files along with checklists for other review areas are located at:

<http://hrtoolbox.tamu.edu/checklists.htm>.

-- Bob Hensz

Helpful Websites

Agriculture HR - <http://aghr.tamu.edu/>

Ag Program Directory - <http://agdirectory.tamu.edu/>

A&M System Online

The Newsletter for A&M System

Employees and Retirees) - <http://tamus.edu/systemwide/>

Benefits - <http://aghr.tamu.edu/benefits.htm>

Dictionary - <http://dictionary.reference.com/>

Employment

Posters - <http://hrtoolbox.tamu.edu/notices.htm>

GreatJobs - <http://greatjobs.tamu.edu>

Forms (Alpha List) - <http://agservices.tamu.edu/Forms/forms-alfa.htm>

HR Connect - <http://sso.tamu.edu>

LeaveTraq - <http://sso.tamu.edu>

Online Employee

Processing - <http://aghr.tamu.edu/processing.htm>

Payroll - <http://aghr.tamu.edu/pay.htm>

Policies, Procedures

& Forms - <http://aghr.tamu.edu/pol.htm>

Selective Service Registration

Verification - http://www4.sss.gov/regver/verification_nc.asp

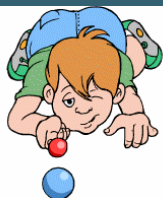
Single Sign On - <http://sso.tamu.edu/>

Zip Code

Lookup - <http://zip4.usps.com/zip4/welcome.jsp>

Did you know...?

A “funambulist” is a tight-rope walker.



The expression “knuckle down” originated with marbles. Players put knuckles to the ground for their best shots.

The upper part of a boot or shoe covering the instep and sometimes extending over the toe is called a “vamp”.

The piece that protrudes from the top end of an umbrella is called a “ferrule.” The word “ferrule” is also used to describe the piece of metal that holds a rubber eraser on a pencil.



“Kazatsky” is the popular, vigorous Russian folk dance performed by a man. It is characterized by a step in which, from a squatting position, each leg is alternately kicked out.



The loop on a belt that holds the loose end is called a “keeper”.

The plastic covering on the end of a shoelace is called an “aglet.”



Someone who faces the glare of publicity may be said to be in the “limelight”. American chemist Robert Hare discovered that a blowpipe flame acting upon a block of calcium oxide—which is lime—produces a brilliant white light that could be used to illuminate theater stages.

What's New in HR Connect?

Have you ever wished for easy answers to any of the following questions?

- Who did I name as beneficiaries?
- Isn't there one place I can find all of my insurance information?
- In the event of a personal emergency, who would my supervisor contact?
- How do I change my federal income tax withholding?
- I've just become a supervisor – How do I manage employee performance? What does "exempt" mean?

You're in luck! **HR Connect** has all this and more. Login through Single Sign On (SSO), choose HR Connect, and find answers to the questions above and more:

Personal

- Update your personal contact information
- Indicate whether your personal information should be kept private
- Update your emergency contact information

Benefits

- Print your insurance enrollment/contact summary sheet
- View your insurance documents, including beneficiary designation forms and annual enrollment letters

Payroll

- Edit/update your federal income tax withholding (online W-4)
- Enroll in or change your direct deposit information
- View your earnings statements (no paper required!)
- View and print your W-2

Training Courses

- Time Off Issues for Employees
- Time Off Issues for Supervisors
- Conducting Effective Interviews
- Introduction to Management for A&M System Supervisors
- Managing Employee Performance
- Positive Management of Performance Problems
- Sexual Harassment: What Supervisors Need to Know

An obstacle is something you see when you take your eyes off the goal.
— Author unknown

Five Etiquette Tips for Interviews



Ten seconds after you walk into the room, before you even get a chance to sit down, you may have won or lost the job. While you may courteously be given

an hour to answer questions and describe your accomplishments, studies indicate the interviewer forms a strong positive or negative impression of you within seconds of greeting you. One university study had job interviewers indicate when they had made a decision by pushing a button on a timer. Every interviewer pushed the timer within 10 seconds. This lets us know it's not the fine print on the fourth page of your resume, but other factors that take precedence in making the hiring decision.

1. Smile! Few things convey pleasantness, enthusiasm and comfort like a smile. Successful people smile a lot. People who frown are not perceived as happy, productive professionals.
2. Dress Appropriately. There is only one way to dress for the interview: clean cut

and conservative. You may not see yourself that way and know your RIGHT to look otherwise. But this is not the time to make a statement about your rights. Your task is to know how others see you. Avoid excessive jewelry, cologne or perfume, make-up, and cleavage.

3. Be Punctual; arrive 5-10 minutes early. To arrive too early indicates over-anxiousness; to arrive too late is inconsiderate.
4. Practice your Handshake! In our culture a weak handshake indicates a weak personality. Remember, according to research; Body Language is 55% of the communication process; Tone of Voice is 38% and Words make up only 7% of the process.
5. Don't order the spaghetti. More and more interviews are being conducted over a meal and believe me, interviewers are looking for information even there. Table manners seem to be a dying art; brush up on which fork to use and be courteous to the servers!

(From the new "48 Days To The Work You Love" workbook, page 97) Reprinted from Dan Miller's weekly e-newsletter, 48 Days, Business Source in Brentwood. www.48days.com.

Enthusiasm

"A man can succeed at almost anything for which he has unlimited enthusiasm." — Charles Schwab

"Enthusiasm is that secret and harmonious spirit which hovers over the production of genius."
— Isaac Disraeli

"A mediocre idea that generates enthusiasm will go farther than a great idea that inspires no one."
— Mary Kay Ash

Managing Your Time, or is It Managing You?



Do you have days when you sit back and wonder where did the day go? Do you ever feel like the calendar is wagging you

instead of you wagging the calendar? Well do not feel like the Lone Ranger. Time is a resource that each of us have to learn to manage and learning comes by doing.

Each of us are given the same 24 hours in a day, seven days in a week, and 365 days in a year, except for Leap Year and then we have an additional day to plan for. Time is not a resource that waits for us to use it. Like the old saying goes, "time and the tide wait for no man." We can choose to use it or waste it. Time does not care, it simply moves forward. Therefore, each and every day we are faced with the choice to use time or let it pass. Time can not be put into a "rainy day" fund. It must be used right now. Robin Williams in the movie, *Dead Poet's Society* reminded his students to *Corpus Diem* or *Seize the Day*. That is the only way to put time to work for you.

How do we manage this resource? Good question. The answer lies in you choosing to manage time in a fashion that works for you. Even though we face schedules and deadlines in our professional life and personal life, we are responsible for juggling the schedule. We can better manage our time to more effectively meet deadlines and obligations when we choose to take ownership of our time. Time management is self-management.

In an article from the American Management Association, Brian Powers, author of the book entitled "Time Power", discusses his top five

time management tools. These include: 1) use of a time planner, 2) working from a list, 3) organizing your daily list by priority, 4) committing to some type of time management system, and 5) setting up a 45-file system. The article and more information regarding Powers' book can be found at <http://www.amanet.org/books/catalog/0814472478.htm>

When using a time planner, Powers suggest that the best time planners, whether loose-leaf or electronic, allow you to plan for the year, month, week, and each day. To be effective, a time planner must contain a master list where you can capture every task, goal, and required action as it comes up, as well as, a calendar and a daily "actions" or to-do list.

Powers suggests you should always work from this to-do list. You can bring order out of chaos much faster with a list than with any other time management tool. Begin writing down every single task you intend to complete over the course of your day. If you feel overwhelmed by too many tasks, write down every single thing you have to do in the foreseeable future. The very act of making a list allows you to exert control over your time and your life. Remember that this list applies to your business day and to your personal life. You may find it easier to compartmentalize your to-do list by business and personal life.

Now that you have your list, you can now begin to organize the things you must do. Each day, organize your list of tasks in order of priority. Rank each task according to its potential consequences of failure to get done. Start with what you must do and work down the list to the things that you would like to do but that are not essential to finish. Once your list is

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Managing Your Time (cont'd. from page 9)

organized, it becomes a map to guide your from morning to evening in the most effective and efficient way. Refuse (easier said than done at times) to do anything until you have written it down on the list and organized by its value in comparison to the other things you already have committed to do or are required to do.

You should also commit to using a time management system. It does not matter if it is a computer-based system, one on a PDA, or a paper system you can write out by hand. The main thing is to find a system that you like and that you will continue to use. The best computer program or the most powerful PDA in the world is useless if it sits on a shelf. What matters when using a time management system is that you master the system you choose and use it regularly to the point it becomes second nature to you. For an example of a paper time management system, go to the TCE bookstore website located at tcebookstore.org and search for the TCE publication number B-6049, entitled "Manage Your Time" by Dr. Lynn White. This is an excellent publication that will provide additional information and examples on time management.

Finally, Brian Powers, recommends the establishment of a "45-file system" I can tell you I have not done this but I find it very interesting and am considering setting one up in my office. A 45-file system is a tickler file that lets you plan and organize your time and responsibilities for up to two years in advance. First, clear a desk

drawer or file drawer and designate it as your 45-file system drawer. The file should have room for 14 hanging files. Next, get a box of 45 cardboard files to put in them. Number 31 of the files for the days of the month. Designate 12 of the files for the months of the year, January through December. Mark the last two files for the next two years. When you have a responsibility assigned to you, place it in the month file that it is due. For example, a report that is due in October is to be placed in the October file. At the beginning of each month, take the contents of that month's folder out and arrange them by day of the month (1 – 31) that they are due and place them in the corresponding numbered file. At the beginning of each day, remove the contents from that day's folder and develop your to-do list. Better yet, set aside time at the end of the day, to review tomorrow's file contents and develop tomorrow's to-do list.

Rome was not built in a day. Beginning to take control of the reins of your schedule and life will also take time. I still struggle with making to-do lists, prioritizing my tasks, and meeting deadlines. The main thing is to work at it. Try out various methods of managing your schedule and calendar and find a method that works for you and stick to it. Good luck, remember life is not a sprint but a marathon and always take time to enjoy the journey.

— By Monty Dozier
Work Life Balance Task Force

