

Preface

As you hold this book in your hands, somewhere a manager and an employee are meeting to discuss the employee's performance—a performance appraisal meeting if you will. Chances are the manager would rather be doing something else. Odds are the employee would rather be having multiple root canal surgery without anesthetic. What's more, for every manager who's sitting down with an employee to evaluate performance, there's a manager who's trying to figure out how to avoid doing it—to avoid filling out the forms, having the meeting, communicating about performance.

OK, so most people really don't like performance appraisals. Should we care? Should you care? Probably. We know that communication between manager and employee about performance is essential to increase productivity, improve staff morale and motivation, and allow coordination of each employee's work so it contributes to the goals of the company.

But many managers focus on the wrong things. They focus on *appraisal* rather than *planning*. They focus on a *one-way* flow of words (manager to employee), rather than *dialogue*. They focus on required *forms* rather than the *communication* needed for everyone to succeed. They focus on the *past* rather than the *present* and *future*. They focus on *blaming* rather than *solving problems*. As a result, what should be a cooperative effort between manager and employee, working together as a team, turns into an awkward, stressful process both parties try to avoid. Or into a meaningless paper chase that wastes time and energy.

It doesn't have to be that way. While many companies and managers simply aren't getting much value from the time they spend in performance management and appraisal, there are people out there who are reaping benefits from the process. How are they doing it? How are they making it work?

That's what this book is about. It's about reorienting ourselves—focusing on what organizations, managers, and employees need to succeed. It's about looking at performance appraisal and performance management as ways to engineer success for everyone. It's about understanding that performance management is a people process. It's about helping you learn how to communicate cooperatively with staff to improve performance.

This book is not about theory. It's about doing all the things that make performance management work.

Why Read This Book?

Chances are you aren't getting full value from whatever you're doing to manage performance. That's why I wrote this book.

First, we help you focus on why you need to manage performance. What do you gain as a manager? How do employees benefit? How does your company gain? Second, we help you figure out how to do it so it works. You'll learn the steps in the performance communication/management process. You'll learn how to turn it into a true dialogue. You'll learn how to turn even badly designed forms and procedures into something useful. And perhaps most important, you'll learn how to reduce the discomfort most people associate with performance management and performance appraisal.

Overview

The first three chapters in this book will help you understand where performance management fits into the broader scheme of things and the benefits of doing it well.

Chapter 1 presents an overview of the process, defines it, and explains the payoffs for managers, employees, and the

organization. In Chapter 2 we tackle some of the challenges of performance management. You'll find out why so many people try to avoid it. You'll also find out what makes a performance management system work—and the consequences of systems that don't work. Chapter 3 discusses performance management as a system in which all of the parts must work together. We'll also relate performance management to other things in your company—to strategic planning, to discipline, and to training and employee development.

Once we've set the stage, we move on to doing it and doing it right.

Chapter 4 helps you prepare yourself and your employees for the performance management process. You need information to make it work. What information? I'll tell you. How do you prepare staff to work with you? I'll help you with that, too.

Chapter 5 deals with what may be the most important part of performance management—performance planning. You and each employee must determine what he or she is to accomplish, identify the bull's-eyes the employee will be trying to hit. You work together so you come to a common understanding.

Chapter 6 talks about ongoing performance communication. You cannot simply set performance targets and then wait until it's time for appraisals. That approach is deadly and guarantees failure. We'll present some options for formal and informal ways to communicate about employee performance during the year.

In Chapter 7 you'll find a process for gathering data, observing, and documenting. Performance management and appraisal should be based on more than just opinions. It should be based on facts and observations. I also talk about the need to document and to communicate about performance, so both you and the company have some protection from malicious or unfair legal action.

In Chapters 8 and 9 we consider the performance appraisal and review process. You'll find a discussion of the merits and pitfalls associated with rating systems, ranking systems, and objective-based systems. I'll help you understand

how you can conduct the performance review meeting so it's cooperative and so you and the employee are on the same side.

There's hardly any point in managing performance unless you work toward improving it. What's done is done. We need to look to the future and work with employees so they can get better and better.

Chapter 10 talks about the performance diagnosis and improvement process. How do you identify the causes of performance difficulties? Where do you look? And how do you remove barriers to performance?

Sometimes managers need to take action with respect to employees who are consistently not meeting expectations. While performance management isn't used primarily for disciplinary reasons, it does play an important role in dealing with serious workplace problems and difficulties. In Chapter 11 we'll talk about progressive disciplinary actions and how to deal with those tough situations.

Chapters 12 and 13 talk about some interesting alternatives and variations in performance management. You'll find information on 360-degree feedback techniques and other innovative approaches. We'll also answer the most common questions managers have about the performance management process.

Chapter 14 returns us to the central theme—that performance management is about creating relationships and ensuring effective communication. It isn't about forms or judging or categorizing employees. It's about people. In this chapter we'll talk about specific skills and things you can do to make it work.

Finally, in Chapter 15, we'll pull it all together with a case study. You'll read about Acme Progressive and how the company used a performance management system so everyone gained.

We don't believe that it's possible to use a cookbook approach to performance management. There isn't one recipe

that will work for everyone. It is possible, though, to provide the principles and actions associated with successful performance management so you can make it work for your staff and your company. By the end of this book, you will have a good grasp of the whys, hows, whens, and whats of performance management so you can develop a way of doing it that helps everyone—you, your staff, and your organization.

Special Features

The idea behind the books in the Briefcase Series is to give you practical information written in a friendly person-to-person style. The chapters are short, deal with tactical issues, and include lots of examples. They also feature numerous boxes designed to give you different types of specific information. Here's a description of the boxes you'll find in this book.



These boxes do just what they say: give you tips and tactics for being smart in how to help employees improve their performance.



These boxes provide warnings for where things could go wrong in the performance management process.



Here you'll find how-to techniques for assuring that the performance management process goes well.



Every subject has its special jargon and terms. These boxes provide definitions of various concepts important to understand in managing performance.



Want to know how others do it? These boxes provide examples that show effective performance management in action.



Here you'll find specific procedures you can follow to make it easier to plan and execute your performance management plan.



How can you make sure you won't make a mistake? You can't, but these boxes will give you practical advice on how to minimize the possibility.

Acknowledgments

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This book is dedicated to two fathers, Peter Bacal and Stan Moore, who have passed on.

Also to the other "family": Allan, Sylvia, the two Brians, the two Martys, Nancy, Chris, and the rest of the Christmas Eve bunch, who for thirty plus years have taught me what it is like to be human. See you on December 24, 2025, in the old folks' home. I'll send you a rattle in the morning.