

Evaluating Employees... If you do it, do it right

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Employee evaluations are not fun. But, they can be important for many reasons. A properly executed evaluation can benefit both the employer and the employee by increasing efficiency and productivity and providing valuable and constructive feedback to the employee. It can also help an employee feel engaged in their work and connected to the organization.

The evaluation process can help an employer learn about the employee's strengths and weaknesses, identify areas that require further training, correct attitudes and help set professional goals for the employee. An evaluation can also serve as the basis for deciding whether to promote an employee, increase compensation, move an employee within the organization, award a bonus or incentive, and discipline the employee.

However, a poorly executed evaluation can be used by employees as evidence of retaliation and discrimination. Evaluations often take center stage in employment litigation. The employer may use the evaluation as evidence of poor performance. Since the evaluation is a written form of feedback to the employee, it typically carries weight with the judge or jury.

An employee may use the evaluation to show the employer's reason for an employment action was false or was just a pretext for an unlawful reason. This is common where the employer claims the employment action, such as termination, was due to poor performance, but the employee's evaluation was favorable. In some cases, the employee may point to a poor evaluation following a protected activity, such as contacting OSHA, as evidence of retaliation.

If you decide to evaluate your employee, consider the following –

- Evaluate all employees and do so consistently
- Use a standard form for all evaluations
- Train the persons who will be performing the evaluations to make sure the evaluations are properly performed and are consistent throughout your organization

- Perform the evaluations at regular set intervals to help avoid claims of retaliation
- Make sure the evaluation is objective, clear, detailed, unambiguous and accurate
- The evaluation should clearly convey your expectations to the employee, such as a warning that improvement is necessary in a particular area
- The evaluation must be based on specific criteria, such as achievement of specific targets and goals, ability to communicate and take instruction, demonstration of initiative
- The person performing the evaluation should be unbiased and familiar with the employee's work performance
- If there is any claim of bias on the part of the evaluator, consider using a different person to conduct the evaluation

After the evaluation has been completed, it should be reviewed with the employee. The employee should be given an opportunity to comment and voice concerns about the evaluation. Those comments and concerns should be noted by the evaluator and made a part of the evaluation. After the review, both parties should sign the evaluation. If the employee refuses to sign, the evaluator should note this on the evaluation.

It is important that the evaluator avoid emotional, sarcastic or superfluous language both in the evaluation and the review process. The most important aspect of the review is clear and concise communication with employee about his or her strengths and weaknesses and what the employee must specifically do to improve performance.

By Courtney Cox

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