



Documenting Employee Performance

The Importance of Documentation

The value of good documentation is that it aids leaders in providing useful feedback to employees, leads to improved performance appraisals, and tracks both positive performance as well as areas of improvement.

Documentation is also the key to appropriate and effective disciplinary action. Although a majority of employees never require discipline, some exceptions can occur, and it's useful to have a method to objectively, accurately and fairly document employee performance.

FOSA Method

The FOSA method is a way to document workplace activities to ensure the recollection at the time of retelling is fair and accurate. The key components of this method include:

- Facts
- Objectives
- Solutions
- Actions

Following the FOSA method can not only help you keep a reliable record of employee performance but also serve as a guide to follow prior to meeting with an employee to discuss his or her performance. Let's take a more detailed look at each element in this process.

Facts

First things first: what are the verifiable facts? When recording the facts keep them brief, specific and focused on behavior, avoiding labels. Be careful not to interject your own opinions, emotions or judgments. Facts are not conclusions (although they may eventually serve to back up your conclusions). Keep them simple and straightforward by capturing the following:

- What happened?
- When did it happen?
- Where did it happen?
- Who was involved?

Why it matters?

Documenting employee performance does take time but the benefits far outweigh the amount of time and effort required.

When leaders make documenting a habit not only are they helping their employees but they are also helping themselves.

Documentation allows a leader to organize his or her thoughts and be better prepared to deliver feedback. It also aids the memory so that you have a clear recollection of an event and the details surrounding it.

Objectives

Objectives state specific expectations for the employee. Employees are not mind-readers and sometimes we, as supervisors, are not great at articulating our expectations either. Delineating objectives is useful for both parties in communicating and understanding expectations. Define a specific behavior or result for the employee in measurable terms against which you (and they) can gauge performance.

Solutions

Solutions are ideas and suggestions in the form of assistance or coaching that are offered to the employee to help him or her solve the performance problem. Examples of solutions include training, coaching, education or providing resources. The solutions offered should be designed to help the employee reach his or her objectives. Remember to include the employee in providing suggestions for solutions. You can decide whether or not they can be pursued but the employee may be able to come up with alternatives that you have not even considered. This may help the employee become part of the solution while increasing accountability and a sense of ownership.

Actions

Actions are the consequences for the employee if he or she does not improve their performance. This is an important component because it communicates the importance of the situation and your commitment to helping the employee resolve the problem. The actions should clearly outline what will happen if the objectives are not met. When reinforcing positive performance, the actions may be outlined as accomplishments or the positive impact that the act had.

Maintaining an Incident Log

It is nearly impossible to mentally manage everything that affects each of our team members. Keeping an incident log is a way to track both good performance as well as concerns. Another benefit of this log is to keep a continual, up-to-date record of your efforts to help your employee be successful in his or her role. Observe your employees and document behaviors related to performance and pay attention to the following:

Performance trends

- Is performance improving or declining?
- Are there performance highs and lows – spurts of exceptional performance followed by extended periods of average performance?

Significant events

- Unique successes or failures
- Performance incidents that stand out from usual behavior

Incident logs may take a variety of forms and it's best to determine what will work best for you. Some examples include tracking this information in a notebook, calendar, electronic or paper file folder. Take precautions to ensure that your log is kept in a secure, confidential place. Keep in mind that this log may need to be viewed by others if necessary, so make clear notes and avoid interjecting personal opinions that are not relevant to addressing the employee's behavior. Also, it's important to note that recording information in this log is not a substitute for having a conversation with an employee regarding his/her performance— have and document the conversation first; add the log entry afterwards.

Your incident log will also be useful when completing performance appraisals. By maintaining a log you can avoid the “recency effect” of memory, where an evaluation is written in terms of the most recent performance rather than reflecting performance throughout the year.

Conclusion

Supervisors have a responsibility to help employees be successful. One of the ways in which they do this is by ensuring that employees understand the expectations of their roles and receive ongoing feedback about how they’re doing. Successful leaders recognize the importance of balancing both reinforcement and redirection. This way, if or when you do need to provide redirection it’s not demoralizing and may be better received and appreciated.

Often informal feedback can correct unsatisfactory work performance but in the event that informal feedback does not correct a problem, with proper documentation you will be better positioned to support your actions, should the issue escalate. The FOSA method is a proactive management tool. Communicating the FACTS, OBJECTIVES, SOLUTIONS, and ACTIONS ensures that expectations are clear and prevents many issues from becoming problems.

For more assistance, please contact your Employee Relations Satellite Office:

E&G and Auxiliaries - 392-6615
IFAS - 392-4777
Health Science Center - 392-3786
Physical Plant - 392-2333

References:

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