

Tips for Documenting Employee Performance: ***Remember it tomorrow by writing it down today***

Many companies have lost wrongful termination cases due to incorrect or insufficient performance documentation. The importance of on-going communication and documentation of performance is critical. Although appraisals are not required by any government entity, it is good business practice. Documentation as it relates to performance management serves several different purposes: Employees need honest and constructive feedback; employers need to know at what level their employees are performing, what they're doing well, what they're doing poorly, and how they can improve. Remember it tomorrow by writing it down today!

Whether it's an annual performance review or time to have a heart-to-heart with an employee regarding performance issues, both can be accomplished objectively. With proper documentation communicating what is required, when it is required, and how the employee's contribution measures up impacts performance and employee morale. It also supports further action that is defensible in situations that lead to promotion, discipline or termination.

Writing a performance appraisal can be completed more efficiently when supervisors plans ahead. Supervisors should never rely solely on memory to evaluate employee performance. Implementing a simple recording system to document performance for each person is useful, easy to refer to and demonstrates a history of performance over a period of time. A continual log or file of both good and bad incidents works can be accomplished in a variety of ways and should encompass the entire reporting period.

Recording an Employee's Performance: 10 Tips

To begin the process, create a file for each employee you supervise. Include in each file a copy of the employee's job description, job application and resume. The process of writing and delivering the appraisal can be eased by practicing these steps for recording performance:

1. **Date each entry.** Details such as time, date and day of the week help identify patterns that may indicate an underlying problem before it becomes more serious.
2. **Include positive and negative behaviors.** Recording only negative or positive incidents will unfairly bias your evaluation. Also, note instances of satisfactory or outstanding performance.
3. **Write about performance, not the person.** Comments should only focus on behaviors that you directly observe relating to performance. Don't make assumptions about the reasons for the behavior or make judgments about an employee's character. Do not include any personal comments that show personal prejudice.
4. **Be specific.** Poor documentation is vague. Entries should use specific examples rather than general comments. Instead of saying, "Ashley's work was excellent," say "Ashley has reduced the number of data entry errors to less than one per 250 records." Try to minimize outside commentary and keep to facts.

5. **Keep out biased language.** A good rule of thumb: Any statement that would be inappropriate in conversation is also inappropriate in an employee log. That includes references to an employee's age, sex, race, disability, marital status, religion or sexual orientation. Don't suggest reasons for employee actions or make connections between events without supporting evidence.
6. **Track trends.** Track trends to show patterns of behavior with an employee. "Employee was late three times in the past month." *Specific examples:* "Employee was 30 minutes late on May 5; reason given: traffic. Employee was 45 minutes late on May 19; reason given: overslept. Employee was an hour late on June 23; reason given: car problems. Attendance is the most objective and easily defensible appraisal, as long as it is consistently addressed.
7. **Document coaching conversations.** Note all performance communications, including coaching, mentoring, disciplinary discussions and actions taken. An annual appraisal without interim coaching is not defensible documentation.
8. **Be consistent.** Do not include comments about a behavior in one person's performance log if you ignore the same behavior in other employees.
9. **Review.** The next level of management and/or HR must evaluate to be sure that all reviews are following a pattern of fairness and consistency and do not favor or target a protected class. Avoid discrimination risk; always have an independent reviewer. Review grading and review comments to support appraisal ratings. Read any comments carefully.
10. **Timeliness.** A common complaint of employees is that they are not given reviews on time or at all. This says a lot to the employee and damages the relationship between the employer and employee. If you cannot adhere to the program, don't have one at all. Furthermore, if the performance appraisals are overly complicated or the process seems 'painful' for supervisors, they too will not put in a serious effort; therefore, you need an effective system in place.

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