

Developing Performance Standards

Performance standards describe the conditions that must exist before the performance can be rated satisfactory. A key to effective performance is communicating expectations, and one way of doing so is through performance standards. Employees are more likely to excel if they know what is expected of them.

Supervisors can use performance standards as a basis for discussion in periodic coaching sessions with employees. This minimizes ambiguity and allows for more objectivity when providing feedback throughout the year, as well as during the annual performance assessment process. Referring to performance standards can be particularly useful when describing gaps between acceptable and unacceptable performance.

It is extremely beneficial to invite employees to participate in the process that leads to a set of performance standards. Collaboration empowers employees and establishes trust, which is the foundation for developing and maintaining positive employee relations.

I. Useful Performance Standards are

- Measurable and observable so both the supervisor and employee can tell whether a task was or was not completed satisfactorily
- Realistic
- Attainable—they are statements about job responsibilities that are fully within the employee's control to accomplish and are so stated in the employee's job profile
- Expressed in terms of results

II. Expressing Performance Standards

Performance standards can be expressed in terms of quantity, quality, time, cost, effect, manner of performance, or method of doing. Here are a few examples.

- **Quantity:** Specifies how much work must be completed within a certain period of time, e.g., enters 30 enrollments per day. Conducted recruitment activities at 75 high schools this past year and, because of his/her efforts, 75% of the students were admitted to UST.

- **Quality:** Describes how well the work must be accomplished. Specifies accuracy, precision, appearance, or effectiveness, e.g., 95% of documents submitted were accepted without revision.
- **Timeliness:** Answers such questions as: By what date? How soon? Within what timeframe? An example is that the employee completes all work orders within five working days of receipt.
- **Effective Use of Resources:** Is used when performance can be assessed in terms of utilization of resources: money saved, waste reduced, etc. Examples are that the computer handbook project will be completed with only internal resources. Or the manager restructured his/her unit, which resulted in \$150,000 in cost savings per year.
- **Effects of Effort:** Addresses the ultimate effect to be obtained; expands statements of effectiveness by using phrases such as: so that, in order to, or as shown by, e.g., establish inventory levels for storeroom so that supplies are maintained 100% of the time.
- **Cooperation or Manner of Performance:** Describes conditions in which an individual's personal behavior has an effect on performance, e.g., assists other employees in the work unit in accomplishing assignments.
- **Method of Performing Assignments:** Describes requirements; used when only the officially-prescribed policy, procedure, or rule for accomplishing the work is acceptable, e.g., I-9 forms for new staff and faculty are completed and processed with the Human Resources Department in accordance with established UST procedures.

III. Steps in Developing Performance Standards

- A. Identify the top 3-5 primary job responsibilities of the employee
- Use the employee's current job profile
 - Identify those duties for which the employee devotes the greatest percentage of his/her effort to complete
- B. Identify the performance indicators that will signify satisfactory performance of the 3-5 job responsibilities (i.e., Compared to what measurement will you and the employee know that he or she has achieved a satisfactory level of performance?)
- Review the employee's primary job responsibilities
 - Identify the basic activities necessary to perform each one
 - These are the performance indicators

- C. Identify the measurable and objective performance standards that reflect the minimum level of acceptable performance
- Review the performance indicators and determine how well they should be performed
 - Write them as specific measurable standards
- D. Identify the manner of measurement that will reflect the way you plan to monitor the employee's performance of his/her primary job responsibilities. Consider
- Reviewing the employee's final work product
 - Observing the way the employee performs his/her work
 - Review activity or progress reports, commendations, critical comments received from customers, and other forms of documentation

IV. Watch out for the Inherent Pitfalls in the Process

- Micromanaging your staff because they have performance standards. People use different methods to achieve results. Keep an open mind and value unique contributions.
- Writing and implementing performance standards right before the annual performance assessment. Performance standards should be implemented at the beginning of the assessment period so they can serve as a guide for the employee.
- Not implementing performance standards because you and the employee disagree. Agreement on performance standards is desirable, but it is not always possible. Although mutual understanding and recognition of the standard is vital, the supervisor will make the final decision about the appropriateness of the standards.
- Writing performance standards and never updating them. Performance standards are not set in stone. Review them periodically to see whether they are still relevant. Be sure to review performance standards every time the job profile changes significantly.
- Not making the standards realistic. Expecting results that are beyond an employee's control is unfair and is sure to lead to frustration for both the supervisor and employee. Supervisors should ask themselves whether the standard is attainable by any qualified, competent, and fully-trained person who has the authority and resources to achieve the desired result.

- Not making the standards specific and measurable. Standards should be expressed in terms of quantity, quality, time, cost, manner of performance, or method of doing. One of the benefits of performance standards is that an employee is less likely to perceive a supervisor as subjective and arbitrary when the time comes to complete the actual performance assessment.
- Not identifying how and where evidence about the employee's performance will be gathered. Supervisors should discuss with the employee how performance and/or progress will be monitored. Possible ways include direct observation of work, specific work results (reports, records), and commendations or critical comments received.