

Member's Quarterly

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Ask The Expert

Performance Appraisals



Howard Levitt
LL.B.
*Senior Partner,
Levitt Sheikh LLP*

Q | What are the most common mistakes employers make in drafting performance evaluations?

1) Lack of pointed criticism

They do not make it clear that an employee is at risk of being fired when they are building up a case to fire them or, at least, should be building such a case.

Too often, employers prepare evaluations and even-handedly point out the weaknesses and strengths of the employees on the verge of dismissal. The employee can then say to the court that, given all the positive or, at least, not negative things in that evaluation, they had no reason to believe they were in any difficulty. That, at law, is condonation, preventing you from then terminating that employee for cause.

2) High grading

Giving everyone an average or better grade. Many employers have difficulty saying bad things about the employees they then have to work with. Even the most mediocre employees get 3 out of 5 in most categories and in their overall scores. That makes it difficult to build up a case and does a disservice to the employee as they are not told straightforwardly where they are inadequate and must improve their performance. Some employees actually need to be beaten over the head with criticism to understand that they have to work harder and improve in certain areas. Also, why should employees think that their performance is weak if you do not tell them that when evaluating them?

3) Arbitrary criteria

You pick categories that have little relationship to what the job requires and therefore motivate people to do the wrong things. You are not motivating them to do what you need from their position. This often arises when the employers obtain job descriptions from Google, fellow employers, previous jobs or other precedents. You should sit down and consider what denotes success in every area of an employee's performance and create your performance evaluations accordingly. Without a proper job description or position profile in place, you cannot create a proper performance evaluation.

4) Discriminatory criteria

Selecting criteria which provide undue advantages or disadvantages to certain groups protected by prohibited grounds under human rights legislation i.e gender or disability.

5) Using different criteria for evaluating different employees

This can be caused by not applying criteria which is objective and therefore provides too much discretion for the rater. That leads to claims of unfairness which creates demotivation or even discrimination based on human rights grounds.

6) Beating around the bush

Often employers spend their time during the performance appraisal having a social catch-up with the employee, discussing their lives, family lives, a bit of gossip and socializing more than critiquing. By

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the time they get to any negative commentary, it becomes totally lost in the bonhomie. It is important to be direct and not sugar coat your performance reviews and to devote the time for it to its intended discussion. You could develop a formal agenda for giving performance appraisals and distribute it to every employee in the organization to keep the process on track.

Howard Levitt is Senior Partner with Levitt Sheikh LLP in Toronto and can be reached via email at hlevitt@levittllp.com.