

## Helping Others Improve Performance

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*Behavioral science research is beginning to reveal that most individuals are motivated by work they regard as challenging and worthwhile. Their motivation is increased as they're given clear-cut responsibility with freedom to succeed or fail in their own way. The use of a performance appraisal system based on these new insights is now available. Sometimes called "management by objectives," it's a supervisory technique that can be applied by any staff member responsible for overseeing the work of other paid or unpaid associates.*

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As a supervisor of other professionals, technicians, secretaries, volunteers, advisory committees, or other paid or unpaid co-workers, you're constantly confronted and challenged by the question: How can I help this individual achieve improved performance? This is a key question that's even more significant than those nagging and difficult decisions about rewards, promotions, and career plans.

It's common to associate "performance appraisal" with decisions about salary, promotion, and career development. This is usually based on the assumption that salary increases or other rewards will result in improved performance. This assumption is being increasingly chal-

lenged and questioned by behavioral science research.

An earlier issue of the *Journal* explored some of this research as it dealt with "administrative climate." For example, Bruce and Carter speak,

. . . about an organization functioning at the peak of its productive potential in which also employees find satisfaction, reward, and challenge in their efforts, and make their optimum contribution.<sup>1</sup>

They ask:

. . . Are rewards (salary increases, promotions, recognitions) visibly, obviously, or directly related to the espoused objectives—or are they tied more

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visibly and obviously to the peripheral criteria?<sup>2</sup>

They also call attention to the concept that "management gets what it inspects."<sup>3</sup>

Morrill and Morrill suggest using new concepts from behavioral sciences to reduce or prevent personnel plateauing.<sup>4</sup> Research suggests a strong relationship between motivation and feelings of satisfaction growing out of one's accomplishments on the job.

Clegg states: "Productivity of Extension personnel is dependent in large measure on their motivation." Several of the five theories of motivation he discusses relate job challenge to motivation.<sup>5</sup>

Others have also identified the opportunity to link new concepts about motivation with new approaches to performance appraisal. Kellogg discusses four general styles or purposes for performance appraisal. One is the coaching appraisal aimed at improved performance. Another is the career guidance appraisal as a basis for counseling about career plans. A third is designed to assemble facts on which to base salary action, and the final one is appraisal for promotion decisions.<sup>6</sup>

It's apparent that different data might be required for each of the four types of appraisal. It's obvious also that an organization has continuing need to use each of the four approaches and that each is significant, even crucial, at times in the life of both the individual and the organization.

## Performance Appraisal

This article centers around the coaching appraisal to improve performance. The concepts and practices presented may be used at any point in an organization . . . by top management supervising middle managers, by first-line supervisors, or those who supervise volunteers or advisory groups.

In its bare essentials this form of performance appraisal consists of these steps: (1) review and reach agreement concerning the individual's job description, (2) agree on objectives or expected performance at the beginning of the period, (3) agree on need for and time of any periodic review or checkpoints, (4) review actual accomplishments at the end of the period, (5) examine reasons for successes and failures, (6) agree on actions required of the supervisor and subordinate to increase successes and reduce failures, and (7) establish new goals for the period ahead.

Schleh describes the general concept as "management by results."<sup>7</sup> McConkey uses the same expression.<sup>8</sup> Others speak of "management by objectives." Gellerman<sup>9</sup> writes about "management by motivation." Whatever the phrase, the central idea is to focus on objectives and results. The details of the method may be varied to suit the situation and the type of personnel being supervised. A different approach would be taken with professionals than with the technicians or volunteers. But, the concept is the same.

This focus on results sharply contrasts with many of the appraisal systems now in use. A review of appraisal forms and instructions assembled from Extension in several states reveals that appraisal is frequently based on the study of traits such as: leadership, initiative, intelligence, dependability, cooperation, personality, alertness, judgment. Other systems try to evaluate skills such as counseling techniques, communication, ability to organize, and administrative or supervisory abilities.

Another approach which is sometimes used in reviewing work performance consists of evaluations of program planning, program execution, Extension organization, understanding of the job, program evaluation, and understanding of objectives.

Presumably, the items in these systems have some relationship to performance. But it seems simpler and more direct to get to the heart of the matter and ask, "What was accomplished?" The futility and difficulties involved in using personality traits in performance rating plans was discussed in the March-April, 1963, issue of *Personnel Administration*. The authors cite problems of observing the trait, which include the "halo" effect, the question of relevance of the trait, the emphasis on conformity, and similar limitations.<sup>10</sup>

Harris and Heise summarize a positive approach under the heading "Tasks, Not Traits—The Key to Better Performance Review."<sup>11</sup>

### What Is a Task?

In agreeing with Harris and Heise, we ask: What is a "task"? Is program planning a task? Some Extension agents would say, "It sure is!" But, really, is that what agents are paid for? Extension administration may sometimes give that impression. But, in fact, program planning, subject-matter knowledge, professional improvement, and many similar topics listed on appraisal forms are but means to an end.

The real end is changed behavior in the Extension audience. If this could be tallied at the end of the year like the score in a basketball game, performance appraisal would be easy. High score wins!

Actually, some Extension efforts can be measured almost that precisely. For example, the results of an effort to introduce a new crop variety can be measured quite precisely by the percentage of varieties sold by the local suppliers. An effort to teach families to use the food stamp plan can be measured by the number of families acquiring the stamps, and by the regularity of use and quantity used.

An effort to improve the nutrition of families in a certain area may not be so easy to measure and the performance review may have to focus on the intensity, duration, and thoroughness of the educational effort. The number of people participating and the continuity of their participation are also indices of program effectiveness. Sample surveys,

opinion sampling, and random observation can also indicate the results. Quizzes at the end of a meeting can probe for knowledge and understanding.

Although the measurement of results is important in performance review, it is only one aspect of the total process involved in "management by results" or "management by objectives." Several steps were listed above. Each of them has been given special attention by numerous authors, but a few ideas can be summarized here to point out the relevance to organizational climate and individual motivation.

### **Job Description and Objectives**

The first step is to be sure there's understanding and agreement about the specific responsibilities assigned to the individual. Jobs have a tendency to change. Expectations of supervisors or of others in the organization change. Organization or program adjustments also influence the nature of a person's assignments. Only a periodic review can keep wide discrepancies from developing.

The second step is for the supervisor and subordinate to agree on the priority objectives for the period ahead, and the amount of time devoted to each. It's neither necessary nor advisable to account for all of the agent's time and duties. McConkey suggests selecting "a half-dozen objectives."<sup>12</sup> Valentine says four or five objectives will be sufficient for 80 per cent of the posi-

tions.<sup>13</sup> Schleh suggests: "Any objective that is less than 10 or 15 per cent of the job should probably be combined with another one."<sup>14</sup>

The payoff for the supervisor and the subordinate may come in the process of reaching agreement concerning objectives. Valentine states:

Performance objectives provide the greatest sense of reality when they are developed in an atmosphere of close participation, and a high degree of concurrence between a supervisor and his subordinate. . . . But the degree to which the boss and the subordinate each contribute to the setting of objectives is a matter of personal decision by each supervisor.<sup>15</sup>

Schleh emphasizes that "the key in delegation is to delegate by the results that you expect of the man." He warns against confusing the job description and its list of duties with performance objectives:

The difficulty is that the individual on the job may actually be steered away from final results by this catalogue list. He often fails to see the final accomplishment to which some of the minor results should be contributing.<sup>16</sup>

The importance of this first step—reaching mutual agreement about objectives to focus on—is underlined by research that indicates that it's not uncommon to find as much as 25 to 30 per cent difference between the subordinate's view of his assigned work and his superior's

view. Sometimes, the difference is even greater as indicated in this report from McGregor:

In a study by Norman Maier and two colleagues a number of vice-presidents in several organizations were each asked to select an immediate subordinate with whose work they were thoroughly familiar, and to define his role (including major responsibilities, priorities among these, and qualifications required by the job). The subordinates were then requested to define their own roles independently but with respect to the same variables. The agreement between the members of the pairs was of the order of 35 per cent.

This degree of agreement was not significantly different in companies that had formal appraisal programs and in companies that did not. One would expect, certainly, that the agreement between managers and subordinates would be higher in the former case because of the periodic discussions of performance that would reveal the superior's expectations to the subordinates.<sup>17</sup>

Perhaps the performance appraisal systems failed to bring viewpoints closer together because they focused on traits, methods, or procedures rather than on the job assigned and results expected.

#### **What's a Performance Objective?**

Valentine defines a performance objective as:

... a statement describing conditions which will exist when a key area of a job is being well done. The statement will normally include a yardstick or measure to determine clearly the extent to which the objective is achieved.<sup>18</sup>

Cooperative Extension in New York suggests that line items (objectives) for the Extension Management Information System should meet the following criteria:

1. The objective should be achievable within one year. It's a specific piece of work that reflects short-term and local and/or highly specialized needs.
2. Progress toward the objective should be rather easily measurable. It's expressed in terms that indicate the measurable or observable changes desired by the Extension professional.
3. The objective should be specific enough to be helpful in selecting the most appropriate educational activities.
4. Each line item should be written so that it can be coded under the three-way statewide code system for purpose, audience, and subject.

Hours can be wasted arguing over how precisely Extension objectives should be stated, and whether the measurement of results should be in terms of behavioral change. I believe there's a continuum of the possible. In the example given earlier, the percentage of the

crop planted to the new variety is a specific measure of behavior change. At the other end of the continuum, the agent could set an objective for the year ahead that would call for him to appraise the poverty situation in the county, determine its extent, location, and seriousness, and identify the characteristics (age, sex, education, health) of the people involved. Such an objective could bring a worthy "accomplishment," but couldn't be measured in terms of behavior change in any audience.

The crucial need is for the supervisor and subordinate to reach agreement about what's to be done and how results are to be measured.

### **Interim Review**

In most situations the supervisor can help if arrangements are made for specific and periodic progress reviews. The purpose isn't to check on the staff worker, but to identify problems he encounters, to determine help or resources he needs, and to give encouragement and support. It's a significant opportunity for the staff member to have the motivating experience of reporting progress of successes. Thus, the supervisor-subordinate relationship becomes a continuing and mutual process of identifying goals, successes, problems, and ways the supervisor can be supportive and helpful.

### **Review of Accomplishments**

One of the chief advantages of "management by objectives" is its

focus on the job rather than the individual. At the end of the year, the superior and subordinate can review what was accomplished. By concentrating on the results, they can both avoid the embarrassment frequently involved when the interview centers on personal traits or on the way in which the subordinate carried out his duties. The staff member knows his personality isn't going to be dissected by a supervisor who rates him on traits or other irrelevant matters.

The Extension staff member also has the advantage of knowing better than the boss whether he has succeeded or failed. He can take pride in his successes and the opportunity to diagnose his failures. He's able to compare results for the period with those of preceding periods.

Stolz states:

In companies where people are judged on the basis of the results of their work and where an attempt is made to orient the appraisal discussion to the job and its work requirements, rarely, if ever, is a healthy relationship between superior and subordinate destroyed.<sup>19</sup>

McConkey quotes Elmer R. John, Director of Personnel Services, General Mills, Inc., as saying that when the manager and employee discuss objectives and progress toward them,

. . . the roles of superior-subordinate are de-emphasized. It isn't a session to be dreaded; the boss is not going to "spring" a personal appraisal on the man.

The incumbent, himself, knows often even better than his boss what objectives were achieved and those on which he had difficulty.<sup>20</sup>

### Decisions About Improvement

The discussion of the results flows naturally into considering the reasons for the successes and failures. Here the effective supervisor can help the subordinate with the analytical process. His job isn't to define causes, but to encourage and assist the staff member as he probes for his own shortcomings or as he identifies deficiencies in the organizational system or the support system that contributed to his problems.

The supervisor, too, has an opportunity to discover more clearly how his actions supported or failed the employee during the period. In fact, one of the supervisor's main objectives for the interview should be to determine what he can do, or stop doing, to be of greater help to the subordinate in the period ahead.

Out of the discussion can come joint decisions about actions to be taken by either the supervisor or the subordinate to enhance opportunity for future successes. Training needs, adjustments in procedures or organization, or needs for backstopping with human or other resources may become apparent. Hopefully, a receptive and supportive atmosphere created by the supervisor will help the staff worker renew his motivation for the period ahead.

The Extension supervisor can use "management by objectives" to obtain more objective opinions from others who have an opportunity to see the staff member in action. He can help critics of the staff member see beyond personality traits to the basic question: "Is he getting results?" By knowing the staff member's specific objectives and the priorities he assigned to them, the supervisor can better interpret the total program to a critic who may misunderstand or disagree with what's expected of the staff member.

Does this mean there's never to be a discussion of traits, work methods, personal habits, relationships, or other matters frequently dealt with in performance review? Not at all. They can be brought into the interview as they relate to achievement or failure to achieve the expected results. The effective supervisor will help the individual identify factors contributing to success or failure. This can be done, not as he sits in judgment of the staff member, but as the two think together about the total work situation and the progress or difficulties experienced.

The skill, insight, and attitudes of the supervisor become extremely important at this point. He's a counselor rather than judge. He's supportive rather than critical. He helps the staff member set high standards for himself. As supervisor, he also sets high standards for himself.

Harry Levinson of the Menninger Foundation says:

No matter how good the formal development program—

and many are very good—it cannot replace the personnel relationships which are also required for growth—much of psychological growth is the product of relationships, and particularly relationships with identification figures. In a superior-subordinate relationship both parties influence the other and both have a responsibility for the task. If they are to carry out the joint responsibility in the most effective way, they must be able to talk freely with each other. This dialogue cannot be limited to what the subordinate alone is doing. Each party must have a sense of modifying the other. The talks must include joint setting of goals and the opportunity to express to each other how each feels about their working relationship.<sup>21</sup>

### Goal Setting

The final step in the interview is to establish new goals for the period ahead. Again, the precise procedure can vary from one situation to another, but in each case, the supervisor's aim is to have each staff member identify for himself a significant set of objectives that are realistic but challenging.

The supervisor who understands Maslow's theory of human motivation and hierarchy of needs<sup>22</sup> will recognize that the setting and achieving of goals can be intimately related to satisfying an individual's needs for esteem and self-actualization. These are needs that can create a high order of motivation as the individual relates achievement of per-

sonal goals with headway toward organizational goals.

### Summary

An Extension staff member responsible for supervising a group of professionals, another professional or a technician, a secretary, or a group of volunteer leaders can apply a performance review system designed to improve performance.

Management by objectives is a system of management in which specific objectives for a definite period of time are agreed on by subordinate and supervisor. Performance review is in terms of actual accomplishments rather than personality traits or work related skills or behaviors.

Performance review focused on accomplishments has as its major objective the improvement of performance. Other types of appraisal may be more useful for decisions relating to salary adjustments, promotability, and many others.

### Footnotes

1. R. L. Bruce and G. L. Carter, Jr., "Administrative Climate," *Journal of Cooperative Extension*, V (Spring, 1967), p. 8.
2. *Ibid.*, p. 12.
3. *Ibid.*
4. *Ibid.*, pp. 15-22.
5. *Ibid.*, pp. 23-29.
6. Marion S. Kellogg, *What to Do About Performance Appraisal* (New York, New York: American Management Association, 1965).



7. Edward C. Schleh, *Management by Results* (New York, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1961).
8. Dale D. McConkey, *How to Manage by Results* (New York, New York: American Management Association, 1965).
9. Saul W. Gellerman, *Management by Motivation* (New York, New York: American Management Association, 1968).
10. Donald L. Grant, "Are Personality Trait Factors a Desirable Feature of Performance Rating Plans?" *Personnel Administration*, XXVI (March-April, 1963), 56.
11. Chester R. Harris and Reinald C. Heise, "Tasks, Not Traits—The Key to Better Performance Review," *Personnel*, XLI (May-June, 1964), 60-64.
12. *Ibid.*, p. 39.
13. Raymond F. Valentine, *Performance Objectives for Managers* (New York, New York: American Management Association, 1966).
14. *Ibid.*, p. 23.
15. *Ibid.*, p. 45.
16. *Ibid.*, p. 9.
17. Douglas McGregor, *The Professional Manager* (New York, New York: McGraw-Hill Book Company, 1967), p. 47.
18. *Ibid.*, p. 40.
19. Robert K. Stolz, *Appraisal Interviews: A Common Sense Approach* (New York, New York: McKinsey and Company, 1960), p. 4.
20. *Ibid.*, p. 32.
21. Harry Levinson, "A Psychologist Looks at Executive Development," *Harvard Business Review*, XL (September-October, 1962), 69-75.
22. A. H. Maslow, *Motivation and Personality* (New York, New York: Harper and Bros., 1954), ch. 5.