

## Documenting Performance Appraisals

The toughest employment case to defend is the one with poor or nonexistent documentation.

\* Appraising your evaluation process \*

Performance evaluations can prove to be critical documents when employees complain about transfers, promotions, compensation issues, disciplinary actions, and terminations. Review your appraisal forms, and heed the following 10 tips:

1. Ensure that supervisors understand the importance of performance appraisals. Otherwise, they won't invest the time necessary to provide candid, reliable feedback.
2. Involve several raters from different organizational levels. That will help eliminate the potential for personal bias, particularly if the rated employee has a strained (or excellent) relationship with her direct supervisor.
3. Consider the length of time spent on the job for both the rater and the evaluated employee. You probably can't rely on an evaluation if the rater and the evaluated employee haven't worked together for at least six months.
4. Base the evaluation on actual job content while avoiding personal feelings and other factors unrelated to the job, such as physical appearance and social standing.
5. Establish clear and realistic performance goals, review them with the employee, and state on the appraisal form whether he met the goals.
6. Use numerical ratings or clearly defined descriptive terms on evaluation forms. The evaluation

should be as objective as possible and rate the same performance and conduct standards for all similarly situated employees.

7. Don't allow one characteristic to dominate the entire evaluation unless it has a sweeping impact on the other factors you're appraising.

8. Avoid being either too lenient or strict. And don't give the same rating to everyone - for example rating all employees as "average" or "above average." A performance evaluation should reflect the actual job performance of each particular employee.

9. Include all unfavorable comments. Favor candor over diplomacy, and explain why you believe that an employee's performance or conduct has deteriorated since the last evaluation. Specifically refer to any verbal warnings or written records regarding attendance problems, discipline, or other areas of concern.

10. Use proper grammar, punctuation, and spelling, and make the evaluation readable. You don't want to lose face with a neutral third party (judge, jury, arbitrator, or mediator) because your business records appear unprofessional and sloppy.

\* Last word \*

A good performance evaluation system requires more than an annual meeting with your employees. You must provide regular feedback and guidance on job performance and steps to improve it. Doing so will make the formal evaluation much less surprising and, rather than a browbeating, more of a summary of the conversations and meetings that have occurred throughout the course of the year.