

TURN EVALUATIONS INTO MENTORING SESSIONS

Performance evaluations don't have to be dreadful—try the Get-Give-Merge-Go approach

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In last month's column, we introduced the concept of using the employee performance evaluation process as a tool to reinforce recovery principles and shift an organization's culture toward recovery practices. You may be thinking, "Oh no! Do we have to talk about this again? I dread doing performance evaluations, and I hate getting them." If this is your response, stay with us. We'll try to show you how to be creative and make this a rewarding experience.

Most of us approach this process with varying degrees of dread. This is because it causes us to pause and take an honest look at what we and those under our leadership have been doing. We might have been flying along at warp speed, making accommodations for misguided performances (either our own or others'), and we now have to stop and take a look at what's happening. Worse yet, we have to measure it, then figure out how to improve it. Furthermore, we have to talk about it, be accountable for it, and take responsibility for making changes. (No wonder people we serve often dread reviewing their treatment plans!)

Interestingly, we often are more comfortable overlooking misguided performances than pausing, evaluating, and making a plan for improvement. Yet we can transform this process into something more rewarding—something we even may look forward to—and we laid the foundation for this in our [last column](#).

In case you missed it, we talked about using the performance evaluation to reinforce the organization's goal of having recovery-oriented programs. We reflected on the recovery value of self-determination in the performance evaluation process. The key element in this process leaves the ownership for performance with the employee. This example also illustrates the concept of replication: the more often a goal or value is replicated at all organizational levels, the more likely change will happen. So if self-determination is a value we hold for those who receive our services, we are more likely to make that a reality if we emulate it every time we have the opportunity—such as performance evaluations.

This approach to conducting performance evaluations sounds easy and reasonable enough, so why do we dread them? The root cause is related to a misconception we often have about those who use our services. It's the fear that we don't have the skills to bring about change, plus the fear that the person, whether a client or employee, can't and/or won't change. So the root cause of this dread stems from a lack of confidence in our own abilities and in those we serve and work with. This is at the heart of what keeps us from doing our best work—the work that takes us to the edge of our competence and

confidence and gives us the opportunity to take new ground. We want to assure you that you *can* make a big difference in how people under your leadership work, just as they can make a big difference in how people they serve recover.

Let's take the worst case performance evaluation scenario—the “problem employee.” You've followed all the steps we recommended last month but it's not working. In fact, things are getting worse. “Termination” is written in neon across your frontal lobes. You're looking for grounds to fire the employee with the fewest repercussions. You worry about a lawsuit.

At this juncture, supervisors usually take one of two routes. The first route involves lowering expectations of the employee. Both you and the employee know this is not right, and the loss of integrity drains the energy from both of you. The employee *loses* even more self-esteem; other employees become resentful because they have to pick up a lot of the work the employee isn't getting done; and you remain frustrated and treat the employee with a not-so-subtle sense of disdain and disrespect. Sometimes situations like this drag on for years. The second route is to terminate the employee, often carried out with a great deal of negativity and resentment.

Before taking either of these routes, consider the following alternative consistent with recovery principles and practices:

1. Arrange a meeting with the employee that allots plenty of time for conversation.
2. Review his strengths with him.
3. Talk about your perception of his performance in exact terms, so there will be no question in your mind that the employee knows exactly what is expected and what is missing in his performance. Do this with respect so the employee stays tuned in to what you're saying.
4. Ask him to describe the barriers keeping him from putting his strengths to work and delivering a great performance.
5. Ask what he can do to make corrections in his performance.
6. Ask what help he will need from you to bring his performance up to speed.
7. Work together on making a clear plan of correction with measurable results.
8. Once you agree on a plan, agree on how long you will try the plan. When will you both know if it's working?
9. Agree on what will happen if the plan is not working: Will the employee leave the organization, or perhaps take another job in your organization that would better fit his skills and strengths?

This performance evaluation process essentially can be captured by the phrase *Get-Give-Merge-Go*. First, you get the employee's perspective; then you give your perspective; next you merge perspectives into a plan; and finally you take action. This process probably sounds familiar, for it's the same used with people we serve to advance them toward recovery. And if you incorporate this recovery-oriented process into your performance evaluations, you will be promoting recovery-based practices

throughout your organization.

This approach is especially helpful if you are using a peer workforce, since they often haven't had employment opportunities that have given them a chance to learn how to be part of a team or given them responsibilities. However, it's also very helpful with other employees. It's important to see your job not just as a supervisor who gets the job done, but as a mentor, someone who helps people grow and develop their skills and knowledge related to their work.

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