

REINVENTING PERFORMANCE EVALUATIONS

If conducted correctly, they can help an organization adopt a recovery focus
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Would you rather have a poor performance evaluation or a root canal? Lori would rather have a root canal, and for Bill it's a toss-up! Over the course of our lifetimes we both have received evaluations singing our praises, as well as others that said we needed to straighten up! None of them changed our performance much, especially the negative ones.

Yet performance evaluations can be instruments for positive change, both for individual employees as well as the entire organization, if they are used creatively. Unfortunately, they usually aren't, and we suspect they then have relatively little impact on performance. In some cases, they are executed in the same way that some organizations handle treatment plans, with the employee finding an evaluation upside down on his desk with a sticky note that says "please sign and return."

We can use something as routine as employee performance evaluations to shift an organization's culture toward a recovery orientation. Changing any organization's culture is a daunting task, but since performance evaluations touch every employee (or are supposed to anyway), they can be used at reoccurring intervals to reinforce recovery values and identify ways to put them into practice for every person in the organization. This method of reflecting a value in every aspect of the organization, from the expectations we have of those who use our services to the expectations we hold for ourselves and employees, is the most effective way of instituting organizational change. The more often a value is replicated, the more likely it will be taken seriously.

If an organization is using a standard evaluation form and process, it will probably need to conduct a major overhaul, since most standard forms and processes don't reflect recovery values. Bill recently reviewed an evaluation form used throughout a large academic psychiatric program and while it seemed to cover the usual bases, it didn't reflect the organization's goals and certainly wasn't usable as a tool to reinforce recovery values and practices. While arriving at work on time, completing assignments in a timely manner, emulating neatness and thoroughness, and so on are admirable qualities, are they behaviors that will shift an organization's culture toward a recovery orientation? What's really more important is making sure that the evaluation format and process reflect the organization's values—ideally recovery values.

For example, take the recovery value of *self-determination*. Once a person using our services has a glimmer of hope that he can recover, he needs support to step into the recovery process and begin to take personal responsibility for his choices, which creates enough momentum to continue the recovery journey. This is self-determination in motion. But the minute a staff member takes over and starts making decisions and

setting goals for the person, his recovery process is set back. The staff member becomes the driving force, the owner of the process, which leaves the person in a position of questioning and resisting instead of determining his own course. When we do this to our employees, we are not giving them an opportunity to “step up” in their jobs. We are putting them in a position of resisting and complying, instead of creating and contributing, and subsequently they are less likely to be resourceful and original.

In most of our columns, we've pointed out that forming a meaningful working relationship is key to having a successful outcome with the people we serve. This is equally true for our employees. The working relationship we have with our employees is key to bringing out the best in them. We will have the best results if we approach the evaluation process with respect for employees and support them in developing the skills for doing the best job possible.

Below is a process that you may want to incorporate into your performance evaluation protocol. Just like a good treatment plan, it is designed to put recipients (employees) in charge and empower them to make choices and take actions that will further their goals toward a more satisfying outcome. This is *self-determination* in the context of a performance evaluation.

1. Open the conversation by talking about the employee's skills and how they are put into action on the job. Talk about his inherent strengths that promote positive outcomes. If you have the right person in the right job, he should have ample opportunities to use his strengths to further the organization's goals and allow him to shine.
2. Once you've reminded the employee of his assets, turn the process over to him, just as a therapist would if she were empowering a person receiving services to recover. Ask him how he plans to use his strengths and skills to implement the organization's recovery vision, and ask him what his goals are.
3. Ask him how he plans to continue his professional development and what he will need from you to do this.
4. Ask him what changes he will need to make to increase his effectiveness.
5. Ask him what areas he thinks need improvement and how he plans to make them.
6. Ask him how he wants to receive feedback from you and others on his performance.
7. If the person isn't performing well, ask him how he wants to handle it.

Each of the responses should include ways to measure if the person accomplished his goal and a time by which he hopes to do so.

The obvious advantage of incorporating self-determination into performance evaluations is the clear message that the ownership for performance improvement is with the

employee, while the supervisor holds the employee accountable for meeting the employee's goals. This shift in ownership does not take away from a supervisor's overall responsibilities, but rather enhances his ability to promote personal growth and accountability in work teams. Another advantage is that management role-models self-determination for the employees, who then are better able to replicate the attitude and behavior in their work with people receiving services.

We will continue this conversation in our next column, discussing ways to enhance outstanding performance as well as to correct substandard performance to reflect recovery values.

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