

## — The **HR** Professional —

### To Boost Productivity, Create the Right Performance Expectations

Being able to identify the most important aspects of an employee's job description and then measure that employee's performance against those metrics is always important, but even more so during turbulent times, says James Stodd, M.S., SPHR, independent consultant with JT Stodd & Associates ([www.jtstodd.com](http://www.jtstodd.com)) and a University of California Irvine Extension (UCIE) course instructor.

Developing challenging performance expectations and boosting employee productivity, engagement, and morale during times when many organizations have had staff reductions and hiring freezes is not an easy task, he notes.

"In webinars I teach for UCIE, I've tried to get [HR professionals and managers] back to the basics, to streamline the organizational structure, and to focus on the things that people need to do for the business to keep going, to keep the organization healthy," says Stodd.

"Pick out the key three, four, or five duties and responsibilities that the incumbent in the position needs to do consistently and to do very well. Then you can develop behaviorally ranked rating scales based on a picture of what the ideal behavior looks like and a picture of what poor performance would look like."

#### Ranking Performance

Ranking on these scales would go as follows, according to Stodd:

- 1: poor performance
- 2: below expectations
- 3: meets expectations
- 4: exceeds expectations
- 5: excellent

Supervisors should communicate expectations and key duties to each employee, highlight the ideal behaviors for completion of the duties, and explain why these duties and

behaviors are important and when performance will be measured, notes Stodd.

"During these turbulent times, it might be good to look at and revise these expectations even on a quarterly basis to meet changing needs," he says.

For example, Stodd describes the four key duties of a bookkeeper—a job included in many organizations—with the best and the worst outcome noted:

1. Entries to the general ledger are always accurate and complete (5/excellent); many inaccurate or missed entries are made to the general ledger (1/poor).
2. Items are always posted to the appropriate account (5); many mistakes occur, with revenues or expenses posted to the wrong accounts (1).
3. The general ledger always reconciles and balances with the transaction documents, receipts, invoices, etc. (5); the transaction documents are not available to support the general ledger posting (1).
4. Work is always completed in sufficient time for the monthly closing (5); work is rarely completed prior to the due date/ before the closing (1).

#### Rewarding Performance

Because rewarding employees for good to excellent performance usually results in stronger employee engagement and dedication, creating other rewards in addition to an annual salary increase might be a good idea, suggests Stodd.

"I advise people to set aside additional monies for group or individual basis rewards to say thank you. For example, a quarterly bonus might be \$200 if someone is doing a really good job. It should be memorable and not expected," he explains.

Another idea is allowing employees who are exceeding expectations to choose something from a gift catalog of choice, says Stodd.

What should you do about the employees consistently rating as a 3 (meets expectations)? Stodd says, "Threes deserve a pat on the back and a thank you. And the goal is to help them work toward a 4. Most people who are consistently performing as a 3 want to be a 4 or a 5. A supervisor's job is to coach the employees."

If employees are consistently underperforming at the 2 (below expectations) level, they need even more assistance, says Stodd. "They might need more training; they might be inexperienced; they need intensive help. They need coaching and mentoring to grow in their jobs.

"There also may be something going on in their personal or professional lives that is holding them back, or it may be a whole group of people that need coaching and mentoring," asserts Stodd. And of course, there are the people who are rated at 1 (poor performance) and consistently do a poor job, he points out. "That's where counseling and disciplinary action need to be taken."

#### Key Duties in Interviews

The key duties can also be used for recruitment purposes during behavioral interviews conducted by the recruiter and hiring manager, comments Stodd. A key factor can be described to the interviewee, who is then asked in turn to describe a similar task completed so the interviewee can be rated on his or her job knowledge.

Upcoming online HR courses through UCIE and information regarding a free webinar on Tuesday, August 18, at 11:30 a.m. Pacific Time, "Educational Planning Session: Human Resources Management Webinar," are available at <http://unex.uci.edu/services/events>.