



Sherpa Strength: The Newsletter of Executive Coaching

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Performance Evaluations:

Who Are They For?

By Judith Colemon, Sherpa Guide author

For the Sherpa Coach.... Here's a case study to see how you would handle a difficult client.

Place: Ace Manufacturing is a union shop in an aging New England town. Once, Ace provided jobs for 455 employees, but its fortunes are on the wane.

People: Greg is a line supervisor with 30 employees under him. He enjoys his place on the line, and he is good at his job. Greg's happy he has kept his job for the last 28 years. If Greg can hold on for another five, he'll be able to retire with a modest pension. Greg is just not getting the respect he thinks he deserves and you have been hired to help Greg change some of the behaviors that are stopping him from being the most effective supervisor.

Problem: Victor is Greg's new boss. Recently transferred from a smaller shop, he is just getting to know his workers. Victor has learned that Greg is a solid worker, all tasks and no talent with people. Victor sets up performance evaluations for his workers, so he can get to know them better. Greg's last eval was four years and two bosses back.



With ten 'performance benchmarks' to be measured, Victor sets a time to sit down with Greg and share the results. Eight times, the box labeled "Meets Expectations" is checked. Two of the boxes that say "Unsatisfactory" have a check mark. The column called "Exceeds Expectations" is empty.

Greg listens politely, accepts his evaluation but chooses not to discuss it. The session ends relatively quickly.

You are coaching Greg. Greg comes to you at your next meeting. He is disgruntled and angry with his new boss Victor. He is ranting and raving with you about his performance evaluation. How can you, the coach, handle this situation? How can you make this a learning opportunity for Greg?

Performance Evaluations, continued

Example:

Coach: What is the purpose of a performance evaluation?

Greg: For your boss to tell you how you are doing.

Coach: What is your role in the discussion?

Greg: To sign the evaluation unless I see a discrepancy.

Coach: Really? Did you see a discrepancy?

Greg: well.... I just know I do this job better than anybody else. As a matter of fact, I am the only one who knows how to do my job. They keep saying they'll have me train someone, but it hasn't happened.

Coach: So was that evaluation OK with you?

Greg: No, not really. It wasn't true.

Coach: Greg, what could you have done differently?

Greg: I don't know.

Coach: What are the facts?

Greg: My boss is new. He had to do an evaluation.

Coach: OK. He had to do it. Where was your opportunity? Do you get many chances to sit down and talk with Victor?

Greg: Well, it's not like he's asked me to lunch. No, we don't talk.

Coach: Greg, with any boss, particularly a new one, you don't know much about each other. A performance evaluation is the perfect time to learn something about each other. I'm going to give you some homework. Drop by Victor's office and ask for an appointment. Tell him you have had an opportunity to think about your conversation. Tell him you want to talk. What question could you ask him?

Greg: well, I don't want that evaluation sitting in my file. I guess I should talk to him more. I would like to ask him 'what can I do to get to know you better?', and then ask him to lunch or something.

Coach: That's a good start . . . and it has everything to do with you.

Performance evaluations: Who are they for? They're a chance for boss and employee to talk. What has been happening? What's next? How can they best support each other? It is a perfect opportunity to build rapport. Performance evaluations can be a wake-up call or a way to punish bad behavior. More often, they should be a vehicle for effective communication between employer and employee.

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