

# HR Insights

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## Performance Evaluations: Common Supervisor Mistakes

There are a variety of common issues that supervisors should be aware of when evaluating employees. Training supervisors properly is an essential step in avoiding lawsuits and other problems.

- **Rating inflation**—As a general rule, supervisors give employees inflated performance appraisals because they are afraid that honest evaluations will damage their working relationships. Evaluations should be comparative and should reflect reality. Inflated performance appraisals give employees a false sense of security, deprive them of an opportunity to improve and create litigation risks for the company.
- **Prejudice or bias**—Management should be alert to possible bias when performing evaluations. Bias can be based on race, sex, age, religion, educational accomplishments, past jobs or anything else that is not job-related, even if subtle or unintentional. If the employee is a favorite or well-liked, a higher rating than the performance justifies may be given. Reviewers also tend to overlook certain weaknesses that are similar to those that he or she personally possesses.
- **Failure to use the full rating scale**—Supervisors place employees at the average often because it is the easy thing to do. The midpoint avoids the difficulty of making and justifying a more accurate assessment. Supervisors do not do anyone a favor by not

using the rating scale accurately and completely.

- **Inconsistencies in scoring weighting or defining factors**—Supervisors frequently fail to understand the rating system, often providing comments that are inconsistent with the rating. This creates a credibility problem for employers in litigation suits.
- **Unrealistic goals or objectives**—Evaluations may reflect the shortcomings of management. If a supervisor establishes unrealistic goals and then negatively evaluates an employee because he or she has not met the goals, the supervisor is creating problems for the company.
- **Inadequate observation**—Those evaluating employees must be completely familiar with all aspects of the employees' jobs to ensure complete and accurate evaluations.
- **Inappropriate time span for review**—Appraisals should cover the complete period of time since the last evaluation, and supervisors should be familiar with prior evaluations for goal-setting and appraisal. However, they should not repeatedly look backward and bring up problems that existed in the past, nor should they focus only on very recent improvement.
- **Allotting sufficient time**—The reviewer often does not set aside sufficient time to allow for a meaningful performance evaluation. Careful planning and

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- scheduling will enable the reviewer to conduct a more effective evaluation.
- **Lack of comments**—Meaningful and constructive comments and explanations are critical not only if an evaluation must be defended in court, but also for employee improvement.
- **Misleading comments**—It's much easier for a supervisor to say that an employee is "improving" than to say that the employee's performance is not at the expected or desired level. The evaluation should say explicitly that performance is substandard. Evaluations should not explain deficiencies, but rather identify them and establish a basis and strategy for improvement.
- **Too much or too little detail**—Find an appropriate balance. A general comment begs for supporting details, while being too specific makes it seem like the employee is being picked on.
- **Acting like a psychologist or psychiatrist**—The main purpose of an evaluation is to identify deficiencies and develop a plan to correct them. Employee assistance programs (EAPs) may provide an opportunity for the employee to address problems outside of work that are affecting workplace behaviors and performance, so rather than try to provide support for problems that are not work-related, suggest that the employee make use of the EAP, if there is one.
- **Focusing on the employee instead of the issue**—Stay focused directly on the problem, not on the person.
- **Not following through**—Reviewers often do not follow through with suggested corrective action, decreasing the effectiveness of the performance evaluation.
- **Explain feedback thoroughly**—Regardless of whether comments and ratings are negative or positive, they should always be explained to the employee. Discuss with the employee how to improve on issues, or encourage the person to keep up the good work.