

Mission Ready

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The Importance of Documenting Performance

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In a World that is filled with litigation, the importance of counseling and documenting an employee's performance is crucial.

Performance counseling in the Marine Corps filters down to the lowest supervisory level. It is commonplace for a 19 year-old Fire Team Leader to critique the performance of the three subordinate Marines comprising his team about every 30 days.

Seniors counsel subordinates routinely and as required. Regular counseling occurs annually for Officers and senior NCOs, and about every 30 to 90 days for junior NCOs and their subordinates. Additional counseling is performed to note achievement and failure – as required. More importantly, all counseling is documented. This is done in order to provide a fair and indisputable evaluation of a person's performance and to provide guidance for improvement. The workplace is dynamic and a problem solved once is not solved forever. Employees generally speaking, want to do a good job and want to know how well they are doing that job.

Occasionally, an employee falls short of the mark, yet is usually is a good performer, however, seniors seem to remember only the one mistake that person made. Consequently, that employee's evaluation may suffer as a result. Without documentation to review, one cannot give an accurate evaluation. Proper guidance cannot be provided. Improvement cannot be expected.

Documentation is essential. Employers are often forced to keep non-performers due to the inability to provide documented evidence of substandard performance. Conversely, seniors may be unable to justify, to their superiors, rewards for the top performers. Rewards can certainly be defined as

raises and/or promotions.

Typically, management or peers do not tolerate substandard performers. The task, however, of ridding the workplace of these people can be complicated. With an "I'm gonna sue" attitude, they tromp off the job and find a lawyer. It's hard to fight allegations of discrimination or harassment, unless you have documented proof of a pattern of misconduct.

There are two routine types of counseling; formal and informal. Formal counseling is conducted as a scheduled event, i.e., annual or semi-annual performance evaluation; or as the result of the magnitude of an event (positive or negative) and the person affected is formally informed via a letter. Formal counseling for negative behavior should be specifically documented and should include the date, the deficiency for which you are counseling, recommendations for correction, who and where assistance can be provided, a reasonable time in which the deficiency is expected to be corrected, and finally, clearly stated legal and administrative consequences for not correcting the deficiency. Informal counseling is generally conducted on an "as required basis". An example may be commending an employee for performing a task or job not usually expected of a person of their position or experience, or for simply being tardy. In either case, it should always be documented. Informal counseling can simply be documented by an annotation in a PDA or notebook.

While this may seem to imply that you are "building a case" against an employee; you are actually recording the events, accurately, that an employee displays. This will provide you a picture of your employees' performance; assist you in your decision process of assigning and promoting personnel; and in some cases, deciding who needs to seek employment elsewhere.