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### “PERFORMANCE FEEDBACK MORE CRITICAL NOW THAN EVER”

Performance feedback seems to be an ongoing source of discomfort for many managers and supervisors. Those who avoiding it, however, will pay the price down the road in reduced performance or turnover. For some, it is uncomfortable because they feel "forced" into the process by their employer, oftentimes without adequate training and support about how to give objective, balanced feedback. For others who lack the interpersonal skills, giving feedback is downright painful regardless of whether they have been trained for it or not. In either case, the employee does not get the benefit of much-needed information to stay motivated and to do their best job.

Why do this process at all? Beyond the fact that many businesses typically use performance appraisals as the basis for raises and promotions, it is important to remember that from a performance and motivation point of view, most people desire to do a good job, and take pride in making a positive contribution. They also want the acknowledgement of the things they are doing well, and guidance in areas where they can be better. All too often, companies forget this.

Historically, annual performance meetings were implemented as a means to justify whether or not people got raises, and to determine who got how much of the monies budgeted for this purpose. Mr. Boss would bring Mr. Employee into his office, slap him on the back, and say, "Good job, Jones. Here's your raise, m'boy, keep up the good work." Rarely would Jones receive any specific feedback about his performance, positive or negative. It was just assumed by both parties that Jones knew what he was doing, and unless he messed up, he had employment longevity and would pretty much be guaranteed a raise each year as a matter of course.

Over the years, however, performance appraisals and raises got skewed in several ways. As "politics" entered into the equation, some bosses would "massage" the reviews in favor of employees they liked best or wanted to help to get ahead. This created a skepticism about the process, particularly for those who were good performers, and not on the "favorites" list. Additionally, as business competition heated up and companies experienced belt-tightening in the early 90's, performance appraisals were either discontinued or adapted to the change of climate.

Some employees report that during tough times, many got flat, mediocre or downgraded reviews because of financial constraints and subsequent salary freezes. Because performance reviews and raises had been so closely intertwined, managers did not know how address the good or great performers when there was no money in the pot to reward them. As a result, performance feedback was minimized or neglected, and employees experienced a decline in morale and motivation. To add to the disappointment of not receiving a raise, no one was acknowledging the fact that most employees were working hard to accomplish the goals anyway. As a result, they either left the company or downshifted their efforts in a time when their organization needed their full impact more than ever.

Feedback, both positive and constructive, and feeling valued, acknowledged or appreciated despite individual and organizational challenges, become the "fuel" that keeps people going during tough times. While performance reviews and raises are related, they should be kept as separate issues, so that despite economic conditions, employees can have the critical feedback that they want and need to stay motivated and to do their best possible job.