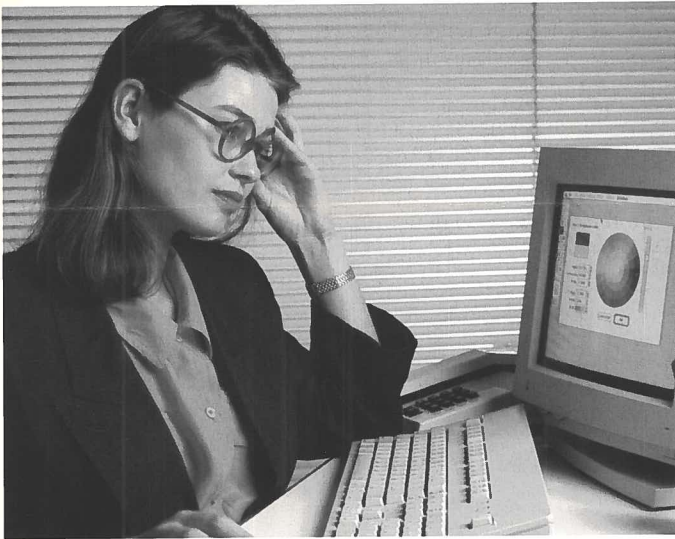


CONSULTANT'S CORNER

Employee Performance Review Preparation

BY SHURLI WILKINSON



Employee performance reviews are most effective when the employer and the employee are prepared for the meeting. The questions that are asked of employees can help them to present themselves in a more professional light in the meeting and to know what they need to do for a wage review. Performance reviews provide an opportunity for the employer and employee to discuss how the employee can become more valuable to the practice and how that increased value will be measured, so the employee is clear as to what is needed to receive a wage increase.

The following questions are designed to prepare both for the evaluation. You may use any other performance evaluation form you have, but the following questions need to be addressed, in addition to those on any other forms used.

The first questions have to do with past performance.

What was requested of the employee in the last performance review and was it accomplished?

It is difficult for an employee to ask for a wage increase when he has agreed to accomplish something and has not followed through. An example is an employee who has agreed to learn proper insurance billing but did not follow through by taking the training course that the employer offered. If, on the other hand, an employee has done all that was requested, then he can answer this question in a positive way, showing commitment and follow through.

What is the employee currently doing to help the practice increase in profits or improve in some way?

It is important to have methods to measure the results of an employee's efforts. As an example, an employee came into an office when the monthly accounts receivables were 2.5 times the average production. (Today, accounts receivable in most offices are only 1 to 1.5 times the average production per month.) At the end of six months, the new employee had collected old dollars as well as money up front from the patients and she had reduced the accounts receivable to 1 times production per month. She was not aware of how well she had done in her collections because it had not been monitored. It was through gathering of the data that she could see how well she had done and the value of having a way to monitor her progress.

In what areas does the employee need improvement and what is the plan of action?

Areas of improvement relate to those required in an employee's current job description. These are usually areas that require some type of training. An example would be an employee who wants to learn to run the month-end reports on the computer and is not yet trained to do this. The plan of action may be to schedule time with another employee on a day off to come in and learn this process.

How do you plan to increase your value to the practice, and, in turn, make it more profitable?

This refers to areas beyond those currently expected in a job. An example is an employee who has decided to become an RDA and learn how to make temporaries, so the doctor can let that employee work independently while the doctor works in another operatory with another assistant. Once the employee is trained, this can increase the employee's value and also the doctor's production, if scheduled properly.

It is important for doctors to delegate as much as possible to their employees. It is a way to keep good employees and give them opportunities to grow and increase their value. It is important, however that a doctor does not delegate until the employee can perform the procedure as well as, or better than, the doctor. It is also not a delegated procedure until the doctor has total confidence in the employee and does not have to recheck the work. The positive effects on the practice and increase in production are easily measurable.

Correction

An error appeared in last month's article, "Our HIPAA Marching Orders" by Vicki Anderson. **April 14, 2003** is the correct date for meeting HIPAA compliance with respect to the privacy regulations.

How much does the practice need to increase in production and profit to allow for wage increases?

This is a question I ask staff in performance reviews that they usually can't answer ... but it is important to their understanding. Many of them say it is not their concern. I feel it is, and that employees need to know what type of profit is needed to allow a business to give wage increases. I don't, however, feel it is right for a doctor to tell an employee that he can't afford wage increases. This is not a valid response and may cause staff to resent their employer or leave employment.

Knowing what is expected in production and profit helps staff to work toward goals and to become more invested in the organization. Employers need to know what is a healthy percentage to pay in staff salaries and work toward that goal. Knowing this information can also help prevent doctors from resenting the salaries they pay staff, especially when they have a high overhead. Many doctors have lowered staff salaries or kept them low because they have a high overhead in another department. It is best to look at each category and find ways to reduce the overhead in each area instead of penalizing the staff with low salaries.

Are you happy in your job, and, if not, what do you need to be happy with your employment?

This question is important because if an employee is unhappy for a long period of time, it will affect the practice and create emotion that affects production. When answering this question, employees must determine whether or not their requests are tangible and can be fulfilled without hurting the practice. I have had employees request a change in hours that didn't affect the overall team and practice production. I tell employees that their feelings and requests will definitely be considered when making changes in the practice, but the final decision will be predicated on what is in the best interest of the practice. A successful business should consider both.

What do you need from your employer to be more effective on the job?

Staff may request a specific piece of equipment or instrument. Other times they may need the doctor to schedule time with them to prepare for case presentation on larger cases or to clarify treatment plans. Many doctors do not make themselves available to their staffs, and it is difficult for staff to get answers to help them with their jobs. If the request is for the doctor to change a specific habit or personality trait, it usually will not happen under these circumstances. It is important for the employee to determine if he can work for the doctor without anger or resentment.

Are you abiding by all office policies?

I am always surprised when I go into an evaluation where the employee is asking for a wage increase while the doctor is considering letting the employee go. How can these two people be so far apart? Many times employees do not realize that if they do not follow office policy, even if they are otherwise good employees, they will not get a wage increase and may even be fired. An example of this is a young dental assistant who was late to work two to three times a week and expected to get a wage increase because she had been on the job for six months. She was not aware that her being late to work could not only stop her from getting a wage increase but could result in her being fired. The doctor had failed to let the employee know that tardiness was a policy violation and waited until her evaluation to tell her. The communication breakdown was both parties' fault. Employees prefer to be told of any violations immediately.

What salary do you eventually want to make in this position?

It is a good question to ask, especially if there is a ceiling on the amount of money a doctor will pay in a specific position. I don't let that stop me from finding a way for the employee to obtain the highest wage possible. One must find ways to make that person more valuable. For example, an employee (non-office manager) wanted a wage that is usually paid to an office manager. The doctor did not want an office manager but did want more responsibility taken off herself and delegated to others. We were able to come up with a new job description and delegate responsibilities to this staff person that allowed her the wage increase, without a change in title. It also helped reduce the doctor's stress level. In this case, the employee wanted more money but not a new title. This would not have worked for an employee who wanted a wage increase and a title.

In closing, be prepared to talk openly about what you want and expect from each other. It's worth the effort.



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