Measuring Performance: Impact vs. Output

Make the most of your employees’ performance reviews

By Lauren Yost

Let’s face it: Performance reviews are a pain. Managers don’t like delivering them, employees dread receiving them (even when they know they’re in good standing), and if your process involves employee self-assessments or 360 feedback, you might find a root canal to be more relaxing.

Measuring performance doesn’t have to be such a dreaded prospect, though. There are ways make it simple and yet still be meaningful (See “Paining over Performance Assessments?,” September 2008). But while simple and meaningful is good, what if the process could be a vehicle to demonstrate not only the value of the employee’s individual performance, but also your agency’s value to the community?

In the spirit of this April issue focusing on how parks and recreation impacts communities, let me make a case that the performance-review process, specifically the self-assessment, is not only an opportunity to help your employees see their part in that community impact, but also to equip you as the manager to extend that impact story about your department or agency to others.

There are opposing views about the use and value of the employee self-assessment in the performance-review process. Some managers think it’s nothing more than shameless self-promotion and is just going to create conflict when the supervisor has to write a more realistic version of the performance that doesn’t match up in one or more areas. Other managers find it incredibly helpful. With so many employees having absorbed responsibilities from eliminated positions, it’s a great reminder of everything the employee had to handle that the manager may have overlooked. An employee’s description of his or her accomplishments provides valuable insight into what he or she thought the priorities were (which may or may not have been on target). Furthermore, if coached properly, just recasting an employee’s description of his or her job duties can help the employee be an ambassador for your agency and the field of parks and recreation.

It’s the difference between output and impact. If you ask an employee what her most important accomplishment was last year, she might tell you that she implemented four new nutrition and wellness classes. You as the supervisor would probably read that and know that four new nutrition and wellness classes equate to a healthier
community, and a healthier community means lower health care costs, and lower health care costs put cash back in the participants’ pockets, and that cash could be invested back into the community (including at your agency).

You know that. The employee knows that too. But, in order to maximize the impact of her accomplishments, the employee needs to know how to frame her accomplishment that way….She needs to know she should frame her accomplishments that way. And YOU need to teach her how.

Why, you ask? It’s a mind-shift that will make your employees more engaged, make your job easier, and begin to change the perception of the community from passive entitlement to actively defending the essential nature of what you and your agency provide.

More-Engaged Employees

People like to feel that they make a difference. When they know what they are doing has meaning and impact, they are more engaged. When they are more engaged, they are more productive. As stated in the Ivey Business Journal (www.iveybusinessjournal.com/topics/the-workplace/what-engages-employees-the-most-or-the-ten-cs-of-employee-engagement), “Engaged employees believe that they can make a difference in the organizations they work for. Confidence in the knowledge, skills, and abilities that people possess—in both themselves and others—is a powerful predictor of behavior and subsequent performance.”

Make Your Job Easier

Some managers (not you, of course) may say, “That’s a nice benefit that the employees get to feel better about what they do, but how does that help me?” Engagement isn’t a perk; it’s a business imperative. Helping your employees frame what they are doing in terms of impact helps them feel engaged through the less-engaging tasks. According to a recent Harvard study (http://content.healthaffairs.org/content/29/2/304), “medical costs fall about $3.27 for every dollar spent on wellness programs.” So the $20,000 being used to develop and execute those programs would equate to $65,000 in reduced medical costs for the community. The red tape of the program approval process, the registration paperwork, dealing with diffi-

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ult patrons—it’s hard to get really excited about those parts of the classes your employee is putting together. Tying those activities to the impact they could have will give them the scope and enthusiasm they need to remain engaged (and more productive) even through the mundane tasks.

Okay, you might say, I get how a more productive employee makes my life easier, but can we really measure “more productive?” There are different ways to measure productivity. An obvious way (and one that frequently comes up around budget time) is money. A case study from the New Century Financial Corporation on the significance of employee engagement, included in the Ivey Business Journal study cited above, found that “those not engaged generated 23 percent less revenue than their engaged counterparts.” Engaging your employees by training them to think in terms of impact versus merely output “does not merely correlate with bottom-line results—it drives results.”

Change Community Perception

Wouldn’t it be nice if you didn’t feel like you were always defending the value of parks and recreation to your elected officials? Knowing that it looks self-serving because this is your job, after all (of course you think it’s essential), wouldn’t you love to see people from your community beat you to the microphone to tell your mayor that the $20,000 he wants to cut for those four nutrition programs saved the community $65,000 in health care costs? Your employees may spend more waking hours at work than they do anywhere else, but they are still a part of the community they serve, and when they are not at work, they are at the grocery store, the movie theater, or the park, and they engage with that community on a social level. So when they meet someone new and they are asked what they do for a living, they might say, “I work for Fairmont Park & Rec.” And they might get the response “Oh, that’s cool,” and the conversation ends. Or they might say, “I help create healthier lifestyles for people and save money in health care costs while doing it.” That response will surely spark a conversation that has an impact on the listener who will never think of parks and recreation the same way again.

By helping your employees learn to think in terms of impact, you’ve helped them be more engaged and productive. You have improved your agency’s performance and perhaps the bottom line. You have turned your employees into ambassadors for the impact parks and recreation has on the community, and you have passively evangelized to the community, challenging them to think about parks and recreation in terms of impact as well.

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