

Job Qualifications, Position Descriptions & Performance Reviews

Introduction

Communicating the duties and responsibilities of a position to the person occupying the position is an essential element in getting any job done. Setting standards for the performance of these duties and evaluating the actual performance are inseparable from developing job duties. This section discusses writing position descriptions, the development of objective performance requirements and the evaluation of employee performance.

Establishing Qualification Standards

In order to get the right person for the job, valid, realistic qualification standards must be set. This is the basic ingredient in securing an employee who can be productive in the shortest period of time with the least cost.

Qualifications requirements are the skills, knowledge, abilities and other requirements that are established for each position based upon the job demands of position. To be valid, these standards must be job related.

Guidelines

The following are guidelines for establishing qualification or selection standards.

1. They should be based on a thorough and realistic appraisal of the job requirements.
2. Non-job related items, such as race, religion, sex, etc., must be excluded.
3. Experience, education, knowledge, skill, legal minimum age, valid driver's license and physical condition are the major areas where selection standards can be set with reasonable objectivity. Other areas, such as personality, attitude and judgment are more difficult to assess but should be considered as possible qualification or selection standards if they are important to successful job performance.
4. Only those qualifications that are clearly needed to perform the job properly should be included.
5. The requirements should be restrictive enough to weed out those applicants that would not be desirable for the job but not so restrictive as to exclude (good) quality candidates.

Steps in Establishing Qualification Standards

The following are suggested steps in establishing qualification standards.

1. List the items or duties that should be accomplished by the position. (Workload analysis information should be helpful.)
2. List the knowledge that the applicants must have for consideration. This relates directly to education and experience.
3. List the skills necessary to perform the duties of the position. Skills are normally associated with developed proficiency or dexterity in some art, craft or trade or the operation of a machine.
4. List the abilities necessary to perform in the job, such as the ability to speak before groups.

5. List the conditions for employment, such as residence in the district, successful completion of a medical examination, possession of a valid driver's license, etc.
6. Review the above listed items to ensure that all items are job related and are neither less nor more restrictive than necessary.

Written qualification standards can be used to develop a job announcement if necessary.

Written Position Descriptions

Communicating the duties, responsibilities and performance standards of a position to the person who occupies the position can best be done through a written job description. Verbal instructions cannot provide the mutual understanding that is provided by a written description of the duties and performance requirements. Click here for examples of a [district manager position description](#) and an [administrative assistant position description](#).

Uses of Position Descriptions

Written position descriptions assist in personnel management in a variety of ways. They assist in:

1. Determining knowledge, skills and abilities necessary to perform the job
2. Establishing equitable and consistent salaries
3. Recruiting
4. Setting performance standards
5. Increasing communication between supervisors and employees
6. Making staffing decisions
7. Increasing productivity

Statement of Adequacy

The format of position descriptions varies widely among local, state and federal jurisdictions. There is no universal format, but a position description is adequate if it clearly states the principal duties, responsibilities and supervisory relationships of a position. This does not preclude the necessity to identify required skills, knowledges, and abilities necessary for establishing qualification standards as discussed earlier in this Procedures Manual. Such qualifications should be established but not included in the position description.

A suggested format for writing position descriptions is included in the employee applications section of this Procedures Manual. It is a format that combines both the duties themselves and the standards by which these duties should be performed. Use of this format will save time and effort.

Keeping Position Descriptions Current

Position descriptions should be kept up-to-date to ensure high productivity and to maintain communications between employees and supervisors. Position descriptions should be dynamic and reflect changes in duties and responsibilities. A joint review by the employee and the supervisor should be made annually, or more often if necessary, to discuss changes in duties and responsibilities. An appropriate time for this review is in conjunction with the performance review.

Performance Evaluation

All employees want to know what is expected of them in their jobs and how well they are performing. A system of performance evaluation based on objective criteria should help achieve peak performance from employees. Evaluating the performance of subordinates can be very rewarding and enjoyable, but also very trying. It is perhaps the most important job a supervisor has to do.

The following benefits may be realized from a formal performance evaluation system.

1. Individual performance will improve.
2. Supervisor-employee relationships will improve.
3. Employee accomplishments and good work will be recognized.
4. Personnel actions, such as pay increases, promotions, removals and rehires, will be based on sound, objective criteria and will be documented.
5. Employees and supervisors will be more aware of job requirements and needed changes in job duties.
6. Employees will be more aware of their supervisor's judgment of their performance.
7. Training needs will be identified.

Performance Standards

The standards by which an employee must perform each duty should be communicated to the employee in terms of quantity and quality. Any evaluation of performance should in turn be based on these objective, job related criteria. Objectivity is the basic and most essential element in setting these standards.

Each duty that is developed for a position should have a corresponding stand by which it should be performed. This standard should be stated in terms of quantity and quality. For example:

Duty: Types correspondence, conservation plans, district newsletters, newspaper copy, various reports and other material necessary for the operation of the office.

Performance Standard: There should be no typographical errors. All final copy should be grammatically correct. All typing is to be completed by a specified deadline.

The following should be considered in setting performance standards.

1. Standards should be mutually agreed upon by supervisor and employee. It is absolutely essential that employees know and understand the performance standards against which they will be measured.
2. Standards should be realistic and achievable.

3. Standards should be set slightly above average. They should be achievable but set to make the employee strain a little.
4. Standards should be flexible. It should be possible to amend the standard if unforeseen circumstances arise that make the standard unachievable.

Formal Performance Review

Most supervisors are aware of the quality of all employee's performance, but this awareness is not enough. There should be a time when supervisor and employee get together for the specific purpose of reviewing performance. This periodic, formal review is essential in maintaining a high standard of employee performance.

Although evaluation of an employee's performance is a continuing process, a formal discussion with the employee should take place at least once a year. The evaluation should be a culmination of numerous informal observations, checks and discussions made throughout the year. The formal discussion with the employee should take place just prior to, and be the basis for, decisions made regarding merit salary increases.

A formal review of an employee's performance should also take place at the end of any probationary period of employment. The "Position Description and Performance Record" format can be used for this purpose.

Click here for a sample [Performance Evaluation](#).

Who should perform the evaluation

An employee's performance should be evaluated by the whole district board.

Steps in the formal evaluation

1. **Prepare for the discussion.** Effective evaluations don't just happen – they are planned. Gather facts, review the job description and performance standards, and decide what you want to accomplish.
2. **Pick a good time and place.** Arrange to hold the discussion where it will not be interrupted. Allow ample time for the discussion. Pick a time when both you and the employee can be relaxed.
3. **Open the discussion in a friendly and permissive manner.** Tailor the approach to each individual. Let the discussion develop naturally.
4. **Explain the purpose of the talk.** Once the meeting has been opened on a positive, friendly note, state clearly the purpose of the talk.
5. **Ask the employee to review his responsibilities.** It is not unusual that clarity is lacking concerning some aspects of the job. Ask the employee to give a general review of his major assignments. Ask which assignment he considers most important, which efforts have produced successes, and where problems have appeared. Encourage the employee to talk and don't interrupt unnecessarily.
6. **Discuss each job duty.** Review the performance of each job duty with the employee and let him know how well he performed each duty.
7. **Jointly develop next year's performance standards and plans for improvement.** This gives the employee a feeling of being involved and promotes mutual

understanding. Make any needed adjustments in duties and responsibilities. Discuss with the employee ways in which performance can be improved. Discuss areas where additional training is needed.

A supervisor might find the following suggestions helpful in evaluating an employee's performance.

- ? **Don't save up criticisms.** Tell an employee when he has done well and when he has not. He won't resent criticism handled in a natural manner. However, it is hard for both supervisor and the employee when the fault finding is lumped together in a single, grueling session held once or twice a year.
- ? **Be self-critical.** Before an employee is criticized for a sub par job, ask yourself following questions: Did your own leadership contributed in any way to the deficiency? Was too much expected? Did the employee understand the duty? Did the employee have the proper training to do the job? Is the criticism absolutely fair, or is it influenced by bias?

Objectivity enables discussion of the employee's mistakes to be constructive. Willingness of the supervisor to accept accountability for mistakes will make the employee more willing to shoulder responsibility.

- ? **Make sure the employee has the same understanding of the job that the supervisor has.** An employee's job performance cannot be judged fairly if he has not fully understood the duties of the position. Let the employee do some of the talking. It may be found that the employee was not aware of responsibility for certain job duties for which the supervisor is claiming neglect.
- ? **Get down to cases.** Vague generalities don't work. Be specific. Explain in precise language where the employee is falling short, and what can be done to correct mistakes. Make sure the employee understands precisely what standards he is expected to meet.
- ? **Criticize the work, not the person.** Avoid being personal when discussing an employee's job performance. There are certain exceptions to this advice, e.g. If the attitude of the employee is affecting job competence.
- ? **Don't laugh it off.** Some supervisors try to hide criticism behind humor. This is a mistake. Although many a truth is spoken in jest, sarcasm and irony usually don't work in an employee performance evaluation. An employee's competence at the job is serious, both to the employee and the supervisor.
- ? **Comment on improvements.** If an employee corrects a short coming that has been criticized, comment on the improvement. Such encouragement lets the employee know that the supervisor is quick to revise his opinions, when they are no longer applicable.
- ? **Don't be a debater.** The supervisor is the final judge of an employee's job performance. This doesn't mean to cut off all discussion. Let the employee state a point of view, and if correct, say so. Don't permit the discussion to turn into an argument.
- ? **Don't compare.** Comparisons can be unfair and unhelpful. This is especially true in discussing job performance. An employee may be willing to accept

criticism of deficiencies, but he will resent it if another individual is point out as an example to be followed.

- ? **Emphasize strong points.** The skillful leader plays up the strength of subordinates. It's better for a worker to develop special talents and skills than to spend the entire time trying to correct weaknesses. Point out an employee's deficiencies and help try to minimize them, but keep things in balance. If concentration is entirely on the negative, little will be accomplished in developing the positive.

Using an Evaluation Form

Because the evaluation of an employee's performance is important, use of an evaluation form is advisable to make the task as systematic as possible. A [sample performance evaluation form](#) is included at the back of this chapter.

Analyzing Poor Performance

Almost all supervisors have had to face the problem of an employee performing at an unacceptable level. Such a situation is the true test of a good supervisor because the way in which the problem is handled may very well affect the life of the employee.

The causes of poor performance are too numerous to detail, but they can be grouped into three categories: the employee, the supervisor or the situation. Determining the exact cause of poor performance and taking appropriate action are very important in maintaining the efficiency of district operations.

The following is a very general discussion of the causes of poor performance.

The employee. Outside forces, such as financial pressures, family or health problems can be responsible for poor performance. The cause should be determined and professional help sought if necessary. Perhaps the employee is careless or negligent. Perhaps the job itself is beyond the current capabilities of the employee. In such a case, additional training may be the answer.

The supervisor. Has the supervisor upheld his responsibility to the employee? Did the supervisor adequately determine training needs? Has the supervisor maintained a periodic check of the employee's performance and suggested improvements? Have the requirements of the position been adequately explained to the employee?

The situation. Do conditions exist on the job that preclude acceptable performance or are beyond the control of the employee? Were standards set too high? Does the job hold a challenge for the employee?

Regardless of the cause for poor performance, the reason should be determined and appropriate action taken.