

>> Don: Now that you have a good plan together, it's time to sit down with your employees, explain the plan to them and share your expectations.

>> Janelle: This brings us to our next segment with Joette Borzick, who is our boss. She is chief of the conservation leadership and employee development branch here at NCTC. She is going to be sharing some thoughts with you on how to hold that performance discussion with your employee.

>> Joette: Hi, everyone.

As Janelle said, my name is Joette Borzick, and I'm currently supervisor in the Fish & Wildlife Service and have been a supervisor for many years throughout my government career.

I'm the branch chief for conservation leadership and employee development at the National Conservation Training Center.

Today I'm going to focus on the performance plan discussion.

That's the discussion you have or you're supposed to have at the beginning of the performance year with your employees.

I'll share a few tips I've learned over the years with you and hopefully this will help supervisors be better prepared to have this valuable discussion with their employees.

Some supervisors and employees hate performance plan time and I can understand why.

My current employees know I'm not real fond of a lot of paper work.

I know some supervisors who would rather spend a day at the dentist if they could totally avoid the paper work that's associated with the performance management process.

Setting up the performance appraisal plan is really important and doesn't have to be a dreaded experience for supervisors and employees.

I like to look at it as a great way to help develop employees and help them to understand expectations for the upcoming performance year.

Don't miss the opportunity to develop your employees.

Looking back on my own career, some of the performance plan discussions I've been involved with were not necessarily what I would consider two-way communication.

The meeting ended up being one-way dialogue and it was mostly from my supervisor to me, who was the employee.

When these kind of, kinds of discussions don't go as well as they should, the employee probably didn't get an opportunity to ask questions that can help them improve their own performance.

I'll be the first to admit that I as a supervisor haven't always spent enough time to developing good performance plans.

I didn't necessarily take the time needed to clarify my expectations at the beginning of the performance appraisal period for my employees.

I've also been on the employee side and didn't necessarily feel I had the opportunity to provide my supervisor with input on my own development and personal performance standards.

I remember one supervisor I had who walked over to my desk and said, here's your performance plan, just sign it.

That was it.

That was our discussion.

I signed it because that was what was I expected to do and that's what I expected to happen.

That's how I typically got my performance plans.

I'm sure that many of you out there have had similar experiences.

I didn't necessarily think my supervisor did a great job with performance management, however, it wasn't worth speaking up about it, and I figured we had more important work to get done.

But I would have liked to have had more guidance and explanation so I could do an even better job in the next performance year.

It would have been a great opportunity to talk one on one with my supervisor about the specifics of my work and the expectations he had of me and my work.

At the time I never realized that my supervisor had lost an excellent opportunity to coach and develop me and his other employees.

Who knows why it wasn't important for him to spend time up front with his employees.

Maybe he didn't take the performance appraisal process seriously, which some people don't.

Maybe he was uncomfortable clarifying his expectations because he'd never taken the time to reflect on what he really wanted from his employees.

Well, whatever the case, he wasn't doing his job as a supervisor and don't let that happen to you.

Make it a conversation between the supervisor and the employee.

I've also been fortunate enough to be involved in a number of wonderful performance appraisal discussions with great supervisors I've had throughout my career.

These individuals ended up becoming my mentors and I looked up to them and aspired to have their great qualities.

I continue to keep in contact with many of those old supervisors even today.

They showed me they cared about me as a person and they wanted me to grow and develop in my own career.

I've also had some productive performance appraisal discussions with my own employees where we both left the discussion feeling energized, motivated and clear on the direction we need to do proceed.

So what can you as a supervisor do to make this discussion a good experience?

I have 11 employees right now at a variety of different grade levels.

Each employee and each position require something a little bit different.

I'll be honest, even though I use fairly standard performance plans, there's still a lot of planning I need to do to get ready for this discussion.

Each one of my employees has a different level of detail and clarity that they need in order to feel like they know what's expected of them.

Some require me to spend more time with them than others.

This is just the way it is because everybody's different and a supervisor needs to figure out what each of their employees needs in this area.

In order to prepare for these discussions, think about what needs to be said.

Be prepared for this discussion.

Have you taken the time to clearly define the critical

elements and the performance standards?

Are the benchmark standards clearly understood by the supervisor and the employee?

As a supervisor, do you know how to describe the difference between a level 3, 4 and 5 performance for each of the critical elements?

For me it's easier to know when somebody isn't performing at the fully successful level.

I can describe and help my employees visualize what their performance would be like at the superior level, which is level 4, and at the exceptional level, which is level 5.

How are you going to proceed in discussing this information?

It sounds a little bit silly, but some supervisors don't have a plan before they start.

They just say, "sign this."

I recommend the supervisor take some notes ahead of time and share these with the employee during the discussion.

As you work your way through the critical elements, give employees ideas of projects or tasks that they can accomplish in the coming year which could help them achieve a superior or an exceptional rating.

Help them understand what exceptional performance or fully successful performance would look like.

Explain the gap between what the employee's performance is now and what it could be like in the future.

Sometimes this is very hard for supervisors to articulate, and I struggle with this all the time.

But supervisors really need to try hard to do this.

These discussions should occur at a time and place

where you have no distractions.

Choose a convenient time and play for your discussions.

Maybe you could get out of the office, find a relaxing place to have this conversation, and since your employees deserve your full attention, shut off the Blackberry or the cell phone and keep it out of sight.

Using electronic devices when you should be engaged with the person in conversation sends a bad message to others.

And don't schedule yourself so tightly you don't have the opportunity to continue the conversation if you go over the scheduled time.

Sometimes performance plan discussions turn into brainstorm sessions that need to continue beyond your scheduled time.

So allow adequate time for each employee's discussion.

During the performance plan discussion, the Individual Development Plan also needs to be discussed.

All service employees are supposed to have an IDP.

Yet there are still supervisors who aren't taking the time to follow through on this.

If we as supervisors don't develop our agency employees, then who will?

We need to ensure our future generations will be able to carry out the important mission of the Fish & Wildlife Service.

The only way we can do this is to ensure we develop our employees and development doesn't happen overnight as you all know.

I like to use the coach approach to performance plan discussions and what I mean by this is that I enter into the conversation with curiosity.

I try to open up an environment for safe dialogue that encourages employees to ask me questions.

So I come to the conversation with the sense of curiosity rather than a sense of already knowing.

Just because I'm the supervisor doesn't mean I know everything, and my husband even tells me this.

I need to remain open for more dialogue.

As a supervisor I've noticed when I remain curious I ask a lot of questions and many times my questions will spur new thoughts and developmental ideas for employees.

When supervisors enter the discussion with curiosity, and when they ask questions, the dynamic of the meeting becomes much more positive and engaging.

I work on my active listening skills, and since I'm not known as being the world's greatest listener, I have to work really hard at this.

The more you practice active listening the easier it gets, at least for me it does.

When I actively listen, I discover things my employees all the time.

I really believe that when employees have had the opportunity for two-way dialogue in a safe environment, both parties usually always come out of the entire process feeling pretty good.

It's the supervisor's responsibilities to ensure employees know what's expected of them and if employees don't understand what's expected of them, it's their responsibility to ask and get clarification.

I know this is sometimes tough stuff nobody said being a supervisor was easy.

Good luck to you all.

May you have great performance plan discussions with your staff.

>> Janelle: At the beginning of each performance year, Joette does sit down with us and all her direct reports and hold that performance discussion.

I know it gives me a clear understanding of what's expected of me for that year as well as gives me some ideas of how I can earn that 4 or 5 rating for that year.

>> Don: You're right on.

Another thing she does do really well is have that IDP discussion with us, too.

I know I appreciate the times when I go on with a draft of my plan and she's got suggestions on how to make it better.

Sometimes even suggesting changes that I hadn't previously thought of.

So for me that's real beneficial.

>> Janelle: Yes, it is.