Developing Performance Goals and Expectations



The foundation of an effective performance management program are the Performance Goals and Expectations; the standards which are measurable and which promote a clearer understanding of responsibilities to customers, employees, and the organization.

- **What is a Goal?**

A goal is specific, measurable outcome-oriented activity to which you commit your efforts.

- **What is an expectation?**

An expectation is a specific, measurable, minimum standard of performance to which you commit your efforts.

- **What is the difference?**

- Goals are either achieved or they’re not achieved. Expectations may be met or exceeded at varying levels of performance.
- Goals are time bound. Expectations are continuous.
- Goals link activity to outcome, expectations link activity to a minimum standard.

CHOOSING GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

Performance Expectations cover three general performance areas:

- Individual Goals/Primary objectives: that support organizational (and/or departmental) objectives
- Behavioral Expectations: that uphold the organization’s core values
- Job Expectations: that are job-specific responsibilities
- Goals that support organizational (and/or departmental) objectives are based on financial, customer service goals, or other performance measures applied to your department or division. These are the most important goals toward which the employee will contribute during the review period; they must be observable, measurable and critical to individual, departmental, and/or organizational performance. The employee needs to understand what

these goals are, how his/her performance impacts the goals, and what specific actions are expected of him/her to help achieve these goals. These goals should be derived from the organizational and departmental goals established by the organization's administration each review cycle.
- Behaviors that uphold the organization's core values are a set of behavioral standards that apply to all employees regardless of job classification. These behaviors are grouped into six (6) general categories upon which each employee may be measured. In addition to the established behavioral standards, opportunities for individual development may be identified.
- Responsibilities which are job-specific encompass duties as outlined in the employee's job description as well as other duties assigned. These will be reviewed at the beginning of each review cycle and at interim times if and when duties change.

Individual areas for development may be identified.

PITFALLS TO AVOID

Goals/Expectations that should be avoided are:

- outside employee's span of control
- unrealistic because of time, resources, shifting priorities, workload o set too low o non-specific o not prioritized o not written down

WRITING GOALS AND EXPECTATIONS

Goals and expectations have three (3) components: task, outcome or standard, and measurement dimension.

Example	**Leap tall buildings in a single bound.**

Step 1: What is the task/activity?

First you must define what the employee will actually do or perform. It is the discernible unit of activity(ies).

Example	**Task/Activity = "Leap tall buildings"**

Step 2: What is the task's/activity's desired outcome or standard?

Once you have pinpointed the task or activity, you must determine outcome. You might look to past performance, which is often a good predictor of future performance, to assist you in defining desired outcome. You might also take into consideration workload; can the outcome be achieved given the workload level? Consider resources, both what is needed to achieve the outcome and what is available. And most importantly, the outcome must be within the employee's degree of control.

Example	**Outcome = “single bound”**

Step 3: How will I know if the outcome has been achieved, the standard met?

First you need to consider the measurement dimension: Will the outcome be measured in terms of

Cost Effectiveness? Quantity? Timeliness? Quality? Manner of Performance?

- **Cost effectiveness:** When using cost-related measures, it is imperative that you consider the significance of the measure given the employee’s span of influence as well as the impact of others on the measure, as discussed above. Some financial measures include: revenue, savings, cost per unit of service, cash or non-cash resource management, budgetary compliance.
- **Quantity:** obviously related to activity, quantity must be measured against a clearly defined standard, and may be expressed in terms of: percentages, occasions/occurrences
- **Timeliness:** This measure may be defined by achievement of deadlines, productivity, literal measures of time
- **Quality:** This is the most elusive of measures and should be employed with great care. The same cautions described for financial measures should also be applied to quality measures: employee satisfaction, productivity and/or process improvement, competence – technical, managerial, key indicators, and clinical outcomes

Manner of performance: Is the outcome in accordance with standard (and communicated) operating procedures?

The measurement dimension(s) that you link to outcome must be:

- Objective– Is the measurement observable and verifiable by others?
- Significant– Is it significant to our objectives and operations?
- Relevant– Is the measurement clearly tied to the employee’s work?
- Reliable– Does the measurement yield consistently accurate results?

Example	**Measurement Dimension = Quantity, i.e. one (single), tall (how tall is tall?)**

Secondly, you will want to consider, up front, how you will determine if the outcome has been achieved. What performance indicators will you use? You can measure performance through direct or indirect observation, feedback, and documentation. Examples might include logs, work samples, charts, surveys, benchmark comparisons, and so forth.

In determining which performance indicator(s) you will rely on, consider the following:

- Is the performance indicator objective? Will others understand the outcome as you do?
- Is it a representative sample of performance? What is the frequency and sample?

- Is it relevant to the task or activity, so that the outcome can be detected by the indicator?
- Is it selective, able to distinguish high performance from low performance?
- Is it cost-effective as an indicator? It should not cost more to measure performance than the outcome itself is worth?
- Is the data available and easy to obtain with reasonable effort?
- Is the data manageable, fairly easy to compile and organize?

Example	**Performance Indicator = observation, feedback from others**

HINTS FOR WRITING EXPECTATIONS AND GOALS STATEMENTS

Getting started is the hard part, so start with a verb. Remember, you are describing a task or activity.

Avoid absolutes, such as “always” or “never.” Absolutes are difficult to achieve, cannot be exceeded and are nearly impossible to measure.

Avoid ambiguous terms, those that mean different things to different people. This includes terms like: occasionally, frequently, several, few, sometimes, reasonably, etc.

Use numerical terms to describe outcomes wherever possible, such as: daily, weekly, monthly, annually, no later than, within, no more than, etc. Be cautious with percentages; small percentages of large numbers could be greater than is acceptable.

“Manner of Performance” can often be described in terms of Standard Operating Procedures (SOP’s). SOP’s are good to use in goal or expectation statements as long as the SOP is written, accessible and understood by the employee.