NEOGOV

WHITE PAPER

boosting employee performance with solid goals

the benefits of goal setting in public sector human resources

There's more demand than ever for public sector organizations to excel. Everyone from legislators to private citizens are calling for optimized operations, increased transparency, and faster results from agencies. In turn, public sector leaders are under growing pressure to figure out how to apply limited resources to massive goals.[1]

To be successful, public sector employers must direct the actions and competencies of all employees toward achieving the greater purpose of the organization. This dedication to goals guides an organization's efforts to motivate employees and to support their personal and professional growth. Linking goals with employee development is a sustained, dynamic process that relies on people and is made more effective through technology solutions.

This white paper will help you adopt a goal-setting approach to employee development that offers benefits to employees, management, human resources, the organization, and the community the agency serves.

Establishing a sense of purpose among employees

Employees yearn for more than a list of purposeless to-dos. People want a meaningful rationale for their work.[2] When an individual's goals are connected to both their team's goals and the organization's goals, it creates a sense of personal responsibility as well as shared ownership. Even if their contributions are small, employees understand how their success drives their the organization's success, and vice versa.

Goals that are ambitious and specific, instead of easy and unclear, give people something to strive for.[3,4] Goal-oriented employees are more motivated and enthusiastic, work harder and longer, make better decisions, avoid distractions, deliver on commitments, and work purposefully toward results. Goal alignment, or the lack thereof, drives good and bad performance.[5] The more the goals of each employee are in alignment with their team's and the organization's goals, the more everyone will naturally work together toward the same success.

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Clear expectations around goals and performance also inspire teams to work more cohesively. Goal-setting is key to making sure everyone knows what's expected of them and what they can expect of others. Colleagues can check in with each other, keep each other motivated, and help each other succeed. Through aligned goals, employees understand that they all persevere and triumph together, or struggle and fail together.

Meeting ethical obligations to let employees know how they are doing

The best employers don't just say they care—they demonstrate through their behavior that they are genuinely concerned about and committed to the well-being of their employees. Being a responsible employer goes beyond satisfying compliance mandates and following the law. Ethically, it's an employer's obligation do what's right, just, and fair, and to avoid doing harm.[6]

By setting goals, an organization shows its willingness to be open about information, plans, and processes that affect an employee's ability to do their job. This transparency demonstrates that the organization trusts and is committed to its employees. Goals also make the organization accountable to the employee by providing a mutually agreed upon basis for negative and positive feedback. It also minimizes unpleasant surprises during performance evaluations.

Goal-centered employee development goes a long way to making job performance expectations, employee responsibilities, incentives, and consequences abundantly clear. This clarity helps avoid misunderstandings, and can reduce disagreement between how employees judge their performance and reality. Goals also help employers and HR staff combat the ethical problems of bias, favoritism, discrimination, harassment, breaches of confidentiality, and inconsistencies in pay and discipline.[7]

Identifying training needs and refining the professional development process

Professional development is more than classes to attend and certifications to earn. It is a never-ending effort by both employees and employers to uplift individuals in ways that support long-term organizational success. Goals give much-needed focus, structure, and purpose to an employee's professional development.

As an employee embraces the idea that progress toward goals powers their success, they're more likely to enthusiastically collaborate with management and to stay committed to ambitious professional development plans. They'll be motivated to choose personal and professional growth opportunities that can transform them into a more valuable employee. With goals, people are more likely to be motivated to work hard to grow into the outstanding employee they have the capacity to become.

When professional development is directly connected to goals, HR and managers are equipped to design strategic individual and team professional development plans that meet the organization's current and future needs. Employers who adopt a goal-setting approach will prioritize trainings that go beyond basic skill-building to promote high-quality learning, build confidence, and improve performance.

Recognizing employees

Recognition that motivates employees goes beyond rewards like a certificate of achievement or even more money.[8] Truly effective recognition is when people know their individual contributions have made a difference, and when others acknowledge their accomplishments. Clear goals give employees the power to continually evaluate their own performance and take pride in their ongoing achievements.

Regular, visible, and genuine recognition of progress toward goals by managers and colleagues alike let the employee know that others appreciate their skills and are aware of their potential. The results are more than happy thoughts. Goal clarity and positive recognition significantly increases job satisfaction,[9] and instills employees with the confidence and courage they need to accomplish even more.

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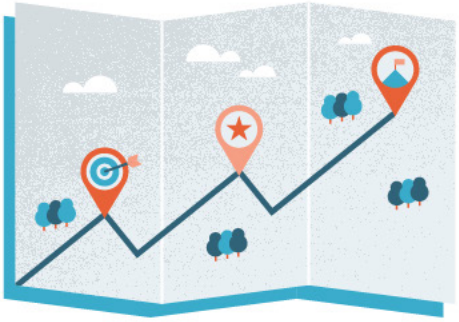
What Makes Performance Feedback More Effective?

Continuous

Deliver smaller bits of regular feedback to support change and growth

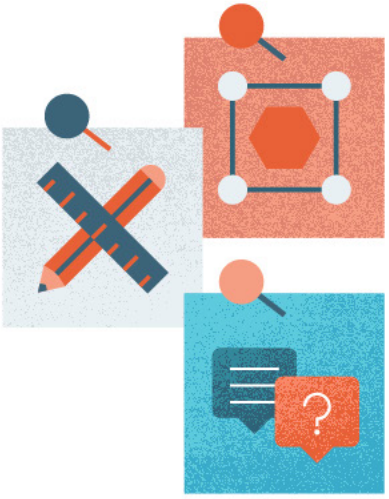
Meaningful

Explain how employee behaviors are helping the organization or team achieve its goals.



Motivating

Identify choices employees have for improving their performance, instead of dwelling on past missteps.



Specific

Pinpoint real-world knowledge and skills demonstrated by the employee.

Transparent

Allow employees access to feedback information and have constructive conversations about it.

Positive

Recognize employees when they do something right and call out their strengths.

Immediate

Give feedback close in time to when the behaviors take place.

How to Increase Performance With Automated Appraisals

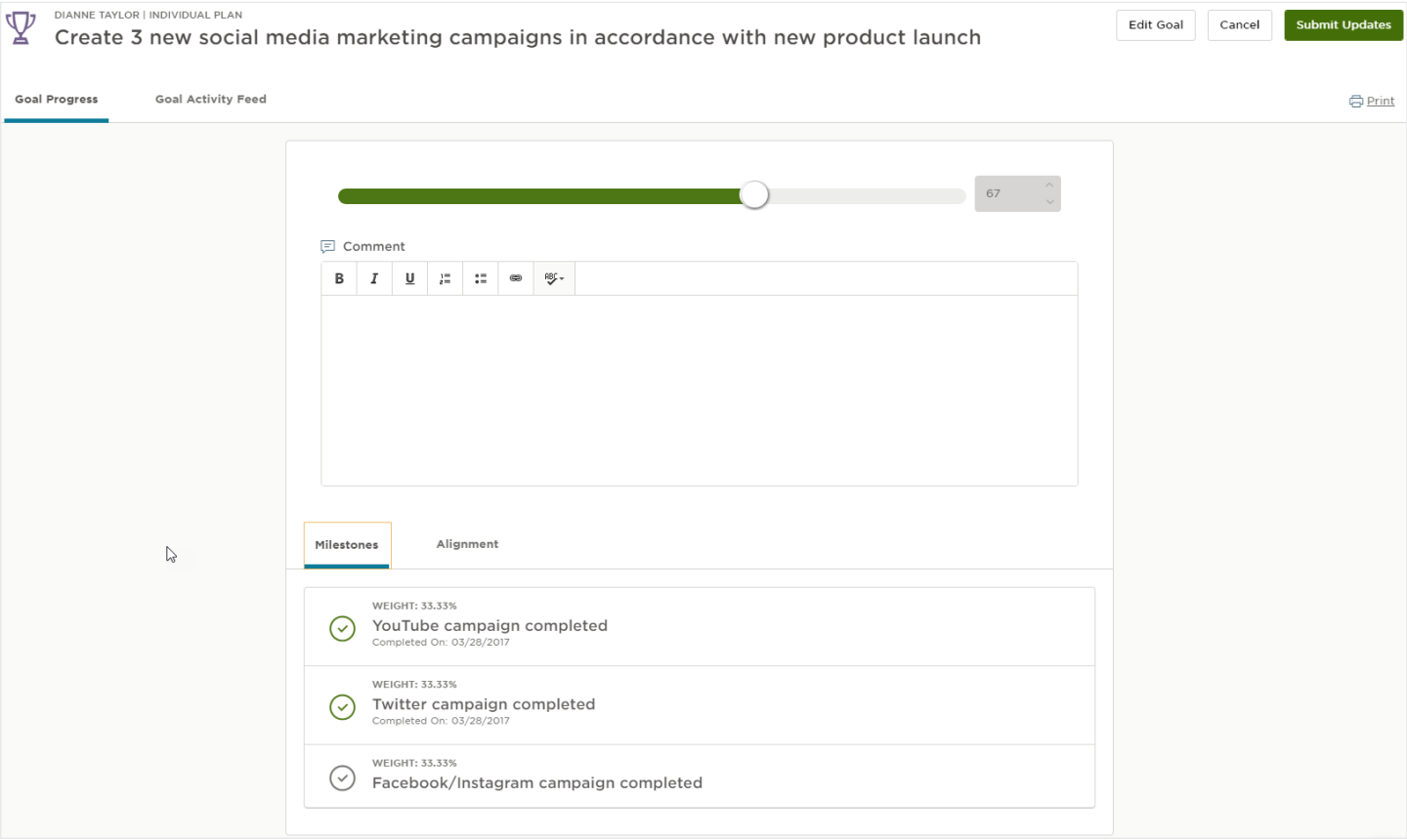
Technology streamlines and simplifies the process of employee evaluations. This greater efficiency makes it possible for public sector organizations to cultivate a culture of continuous performance appraisal. Ultimately, performance evaluation solutions can lead to improved employee performance and greater organizational success by supporting these objectives:

Establishing a sense of purpose among employees

When an employee, team, or manager is focused on day-to-day tasks, it's easy to forget the larger organizational goals that drive the work. A performance evaluation solution helps everyone remember what's expected of them in the near- and long-term. It guides employees to put the right effort toward the most important work. It also makes it easier for managers, colleagues, and employees to continuously share updates with each other on action taken, support needed, milestones reached, and goals conquered.

Creating transparency and ensuring compliance

Promotions, disciplinary actions, grievances, terminations, and compliance all require documentation and evidence. Yet, details about an employee's performance can be scattered across emails, paperwork, handwritten notes, social media, productivity tools, and conversations poorly remembered or long forgotten. A software solution centralizes information about employee performance so it's accessible when needed, while helping organizations avoid ethical pitfalls in evaluations such as bias and favoritism. Crowdsourced input can help managers create more complete and accurate performance assessments.



Goals can be aligned to departmental and organizational initiatives and progress can be automatically updated and tracked by completing milestones.

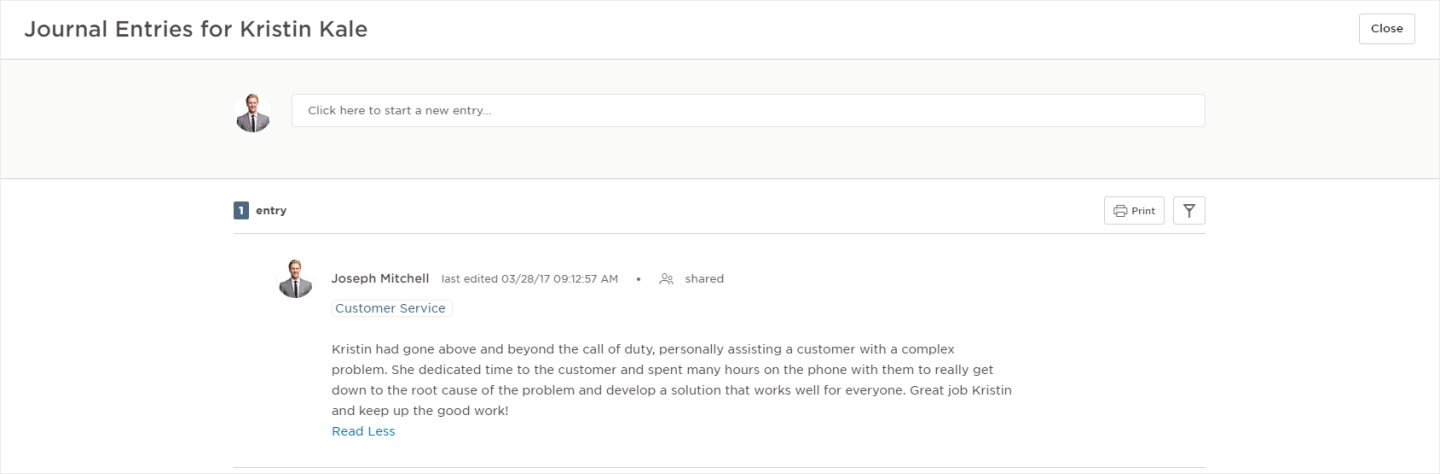
Identifying training needs and refining the professional development process

There are a wealth of benefits in the kind of continuous, real-time feedback that's possible using a performance evaluation solution. Managers and HR can identify emerging performance weaknesses well before they turn into serious problems. Employees can take immediate action to change their behavior and choose transformative learning opportunities. Everyone can work together to identify and eliminate barriers that may prevent staff from doing the work that needs to be done.

A performance evaluation solution allows leaders and managers to immediately, regularly, and visibly recognize positive performance so employees feel valued and appreciated.

Recognizing employees

Employers that want to motivate and retain talent would do well to enhance employee recognition by using a performance evaluation solution. Lack of recognition hinders innovation[10] and is one of the top reasons employees quit.[11] A system that supports real-time recognition can more effectively reinforce employee's positive behavior. People are psychologically wired to derive long-lasting pleasure from taking steps in the right direction, yet only feel a brief sense of relief once they've achieved the end goal.[12] A performance evaluation solution allows leaders and managers to immediately, regularly, and visibly recognize positive performance so employees feel valued and appreciated.



Journal entries can be used to record recognition and/or feedback in real time to celebrate successes or address challenges. Specific goals and competencies can be tagged to identify areas being noted and entries can be shared with others for added visibility.

Conclusion

With the drive to improve organizational performance, a goal-setting approach to employee development is highly motivating. Goal clarity helps employers manage expectations and establish a shared sense of purpose among employees. It improves transparency and accountability, helping human resources reduce risk and support higher standards of compliance. It brings greater focus to the professional development process, particularly employee recognition and training.

While employee development is all about people, technology greatly improves the implementation and results of the process. Importantly, performance evaluation software continually reinforces the meaningful connections between each employee's work and the larger organizational goals. A goal-setting approach to employee development and the right software to support it simplifies employee performance management, leading to increased employee motivation, maximized productivity, and organizational success.

Lauren Girardin is a marketing and communications consultant, freelance writer, and speaker based in San Francisco. She helps nonprofits, government agencies, and companies engage their communities and tell their stories. Find out more at laurengirardin.com.

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