



# RAISE YOUR PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL GAME AS A RETENTION STRATEGY

*Regina Boore, MS, BSN, RN, CASC*

**T**he nursing shortage, a declining labor participation rate, consolidation in health-care, rising wages, inflation, COVID-19, and vaccine mandates are all contributing factors in a very challenging healthcare labor market. Generous sign-on bonuses, increased wages, flexible schedules, attractive retirement benefits, and the opportunity for upward mobility are generally not arrows in the independent ASC manager quiver.

While the current environment presses us to “think outside the

box” for creative solutions to our staffing crisis, this should not be at the exclusion of looking within to assess how well we leverage the tools at our disposal.

Performance appraisals (PAs) fall into this category. Too often a rush job, without forethought and specificity, PAs tend to be a perfunctory exercise, a check of the box. In fact, when done well, they can be a valuable tool for staff growth and development, communication, and strengthening the ties that bind the employee to the employer. When done well, a

performance appraisal helps elevate performance and align employee goals and priorities with those of the facility.

## SPECIFICITY

Start with a competency-based job description that defines the skills, knowledge, and behavior necessary to succeed in the position. This lends consistency and standardization to the process of evaluating current performance.

To optimize the benefit of the PA for the employee, specificity is imperative. Vague comments

and generalizations are ineffective in directing staff behavior. The more specifically you can identify behaviors you want to promote and behavior that needs improvement, the more meaningful and valuable the PA will be in terms of guiding and directing the employee on the path of stellar performance.

### DOCUMENTATION

Notes to file is an invaluable tool for managers and worth its weight in gold when it comes to doing performance appraisals. Disciplining yourself to briefly document positive and negative performance issues on a daily/weekly basis provides a repository of useful data on your employees. This treasure trove of specific behavioral examples lends veracity and insight to ratings in the PA. It is amazing how much more a PA means to an employee when it is replete with specific observations of their behavior. Knowing their boss did not miss that time they went the extra mile is motivation to do it again. Conversely, knowing their boss observed their substandard behavior supports accountability.

Avoid the superlative trap. Words like *always*, *never*, *best*, and *worst* do not belong in a performance appraisal and can come back to bite you. We know the one thing we can count on when dealing with people is change and inconsistency.

### MINDFUL, TIMELY FEEDBACK

Spare the surprises. Employees should never hear negative performance feedback for the first time in an annual PA. Timely feedback is essential to guiding and developing talent. Particularly bad behavior or poor performance should be

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addressed in the moment or as close as possible to the moment it happened, with constructive direction on what will/how to correct the behavior.

### RELEVANT RATING DESCRIPTORS

Use top ratings sparingly. Typically, the top rating on a PA is “exceeds expectations.” This rating is generally not even relevant to clinical behaviors. Consider the competency, “Utilizes aseptic technique and infection control principles to establish and maintain venous access.” Your nurses either do or do not do this. How could they exceed expectations on this? Keep those top ratings for truly outstanding performance you can support with specific behavioral examples. Using them loosely or inappropriately dilutes their meaning.

### GOALS

PAs are intended to assist with the growth and development of the employee. Without meaningful goals as part of the PA, it is a missed opportunity. The employee goals should be:

- S Smart**  
Use action words
- M Measurable**  
Use metrics or data targets
- A Achievable**  
Be realistic
- R Relevant**  
Tie the relevance of their job scope to ASC performance
- T Time-bound**  
Specific date or time frame

### SUMMARIZE COMPENSATION, QUANTIFY BENEFITS

Finally, include a wage and benefit statement with all annual PAs. Employees want more time off and better benefits, but often lose sight of the value of such benefits when it’s time for a raise. Since many ASCs have had a 2–5% budget for wage increases for years, it is important to share a summary of their full compensation and benefit package annually. Document their hire date and rate and their current package, including the cost of their salary, paid holidays, Paid Time Off, health insurance (employer-paid portion), 401K match, tuition reimbursement, and any other employer-paid benefits.

### PAYOFF

It behooves us to commit to timely and meaningful performance assessments as an opportunity to align employee and organizational goals, facilitate open communication, and drive staff performance. It is a tool we cannot afford to squander, particularly in the current competitive labor market. Because performance appraisals done well can assist with employee retention, now is the time to raise your game! **AE**



*Regina Boore, MS, BSN, RN, CASC (rboore@PSS4ASC.com), is principal and Executive Vice President of Progressive Surgical Solutions, LLC, a division of BSM Consulting, Incline Village, Nev.*