

AFGE Council 220

July 2006

Performance Appraisal Survival Information

The new performance appraisal plan includes an alignment statement and performance expectations that include numerics. This is a change from our old Pass-Fail system that specifically forbade the use of numerics—and with good reason: numbers can be easily manipulated and the agency is well-versed in mathematical machinations. After all, by taking unnecessary claims that result in easy technical denials, we produce numbers that give the appearance we are doing more work than we actually are. Unfortunately, we are also spending more time on make-work rather than real work. That's why the union believes numbers do not tell the real story; nor can we depend on them to represent the hard work that our Field Operations employees do every day.

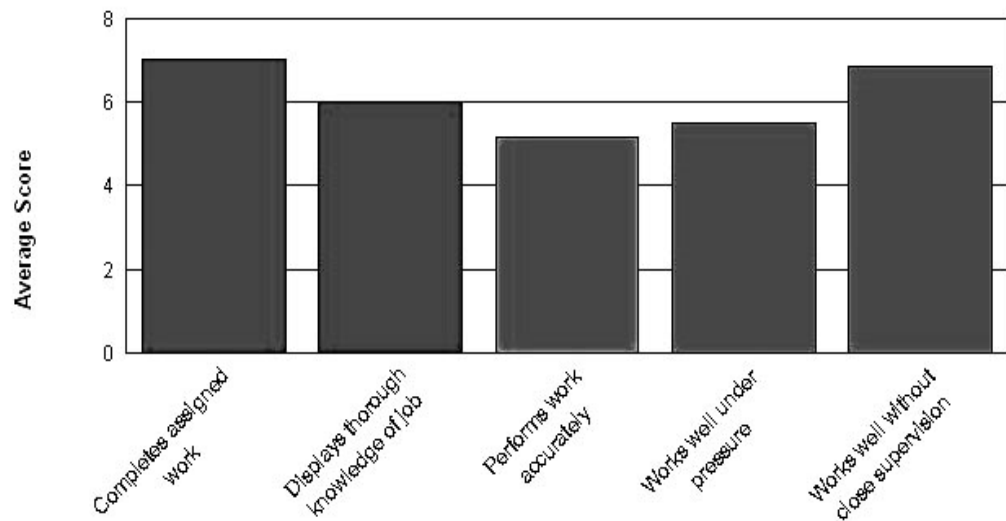
Additionally, not everyone does exactly the same work, which is particularly true if you are in a specialized unit. Nor does everyone have the same level of expertise or training. So, will everyone be held to the same standards?

That depends on which management official you are talking to.

We will be learning more about PACS (Performance Assessment and Communications System) in the coming months. Managers and supervisors will soon conduct meetings during which employee performance expectations will be discussed. The only way you are likely to leave these meetings with a clear understanding of what performance will generate an *outstanding* rather than a *successful* rating is if you **ask many questions**. Even then you may not know what level of work you will have to perform to get an award.

But, if you don't know, then management has not done its job and you should be talking to your union representative. After we have a little experience with PACS, we will be in a better position to know if we should make institutional challenges to the whole system or file individual grievances. So, take plenty of notes and ask for an explanation of terms, numbers, and expectations so that you could explain the system to someone else. If you can't do that, then you don't understand what management

Job Performance Profile

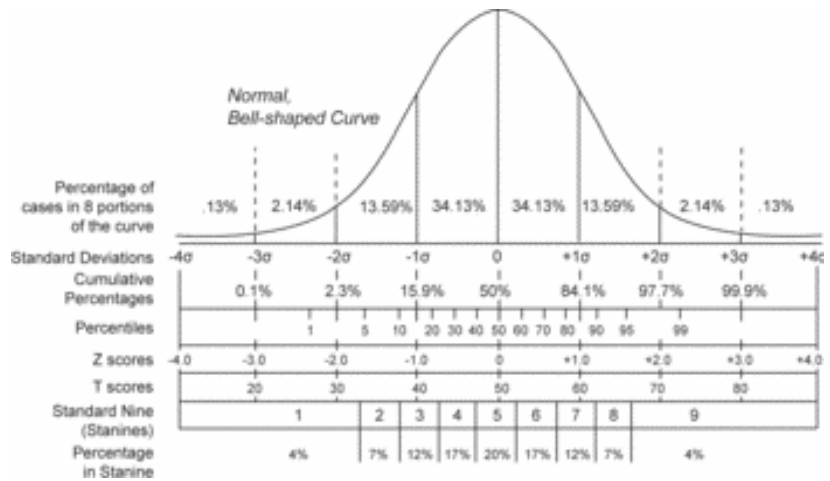


requires of your on-the-job performance in order for you to receive an award, qualify for a detail or promotion, or to just retain your job!

SSA has already indicated that a bell-curve will be in place when it acknowledged that the vast majority of workers will be rated *successful* with a small percentage rated *not successful* and a similar amount rated *outstanding*. This does not bode well for most of our employees who apparently will be shut out of awards as a result! Workplace stress increases substantially when there are few prizes to share while others fear they will fall one step and wind up in the *not successful* zone. Remember, you have to be rated outstanding in all performance elements to obtain an *outstanding* rating; but you don't have to fail in all elements to get canned for poor performance.

So, you may be thinking, "I'll just fudge some of this work. Who's checking anyway?"

Not a good idea. Employees who cut corners, engage in inappropriate work processing or manipulate work measures may be rewarded if they can get away with it; but, they may also be fired if they get caught—especially if one of our claimants is disadvantaged.



Case in point: When we had numeric measures in the past, at least one SSA worker was fired for cheating. His supervisor confirmed that he had directed the employee to cheat; but the arbitrator who heard the appeal was unmoved and maintained that the employee should have followed the order, but then reported it to higher management. Since the Supreme Court now says that public employers can legally retaliate against workers who report wrongdoing internally, it looks like AFGE may have to protect workers by going to Congress and to the press.

Those who want to survive the new appraisal system need to understand it. Review the alerts that have been distributed (they are also available on this web site). Ask questions at the staff meetings and at the individual performance expectations discussions. If management cannot answer these questions to your satisfaction, tell your union representative. Take notes of these meetings and be sure to specifically identify what management could not explain.



Note: Management will tell you that your signature or initials mean only that you received the PACS plan. However, they will later argue should a case go to arbitration that your signature means you understood and accepted what was expected of you. So, if you don't know exactly where management is coming from, you need to document any misunderstandings or concerns that you have.

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