

PERFORMANCE APPRAISAL SYSTEM — ALERT #6

What to Ask During Performance Meetings with Management

SSA management will conduct two meetings about the new performance appraisal system, PACS. The first meeting will address general changes and is intended for the entire staff. The second meeting will involve you and your supervisor. Your mission, if you choose to accept it, is to get as much information as possible to learn how management defines the terms that govern PACS and to ensure that the agency implements the system fairly and equitably for all workers.

Note: This Alert is rather lengthy. However, we urge you to review it before you attend either of the above meetings. Keep a copy with your important personnel records and bring it with you to the meetings to remind you of the questions you need to ask. A copy of this Alert will be posted to the AFGE Council 220 web site at www.afgec220.org for your future reference.

► **Take notes of all meetings.** After the meeting is over, send an email to your supervisor saying this is what you said to me. Ask the supervisor if that is correct. Send it *read receipt requested* so you will know if and when the supervisor reads it. Save the response in a folder. Let the union know if the information does not match and be sure to advise your AFGE Local Representative if numerics other than national goals are used.

Questions to ask during performance meetings:

Performance Element 1- Interpersonal Skills

Successful Contribution—Level 3

- What does “treat the public and fellow employees with courtesy and respect” mean? How will that be measured? Will management audit interviews and phone calls and advise how will this be done? Will I know in advance when the audits will be conducted? Will I get a copy of the results? Will management use feedback from customer service cards? Who will interpret what the service card replies mean? Will I get a copy of the customer service card? Will you take into consideration that the customer may say service is bad because he or she was denied, or just did not get the answer he or she wanted?
- Does “treat fellow employees with courtesy and respect” mean the same thing as identified in Article 3, Section 2(A)? If not, then please define these terms? Who defined this? What is going to be considered in determining if I am successful in this element? How will it be measured? Will management observe interactions in the office, in meetings, in the break room, during lunches? How will employee complaints about me be used in rating my performance in this element? When will I have an opportunity to rebut these complaints and/or your observations?



- What does “listens and responds appropriately to feedback from the public, co-workers and managers” mean? Who decides this? What will be considered and how will it be measured? Will interview audits and other observations be use? Please explain. Must our answers be POMS-complaint? Does this mean that we must always agree with management to be considered “appropriately responding to feedback?” Does this mean that feedback includes reports of fair share of work performed? What happens if the feedback provided by management, the public or my co-worker is wrong and I disagree? Will I be rated lower because of that disagreement? Who decides and what right of appeal do I have?
- What does “communicate effectively” mean? Who decides this? What will be considered in making this decision? What criteria will be used to differentiate between effect and ineffective communications? Does this refer to oral communication, i.e. interviews? Does this mean written communication, such as the use of letters in DOCS? Will we be held responsible for inaccuracies in the grammar of DOCS notices? Will correspondence be reviewed for all employees? If so, who will do these reviews?
- What does “maintains positive and productive working relationships within the office, work unit or group” mean? Who decides that? What will be considered in making this decision? Does this mean that I give in when asked something to keep a positive relationship? Does it mean that I do work the way it should be done or the way management wants it done, even if that means violating office and agency policies? Does this mean that I keep quiet when a coworker makes an error or does shoddy work on claims in my unit? Will I be thought of as being negative if I speak up about office problems or criticize office procedures?



Outstanding Contribution---Level 5

- What does it take to achieve Level 5?
- What does “contributes to developing trust, respect and cooperation among unit members” mean? Who makes this decision? What is considered in making this decision? How will this be measured? This does not appear to offer any objective measure. How will management measure the trust, respect or cooperation I develop in the office? Please give me several examples so that I know how to achieve this level of performance. Am I supposed to tell management if I distrust someone? That would not be the right thing to do by my ethical standards. What can I do to develop cooperation with others who have a personal agenda that may not be good for the unit?

Performance Element 2—Participation

Successful Contribution—Level 3

- What does “provides quality support to customers and fellow employees” mean? Who decides what this means? What will be considered in making this decision? Does this mean obtaining all proofs for customers or expecting them to follow program requirements? Does this mean assisting customers with referrals to other agencies for needed help? What does

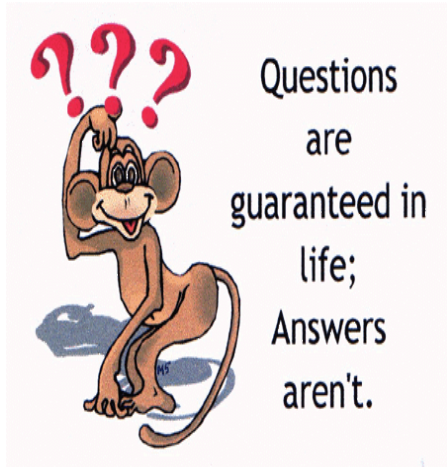
providing *quality support* to fellow employees mean? Does this mean answering questions, backing up when someone is out on leave? What if I don't know someone is out on leave?

- What does “contributes to achievement of the office, work unit or group goals” mean? Who decides this and what is used to make this determination? Do I meet this if I do my “fair share” of work and meet my expectation for timely completion of work products? How is this going to be communicated and determined?
- What does “demonstrates resourcefulness by successfully seeking solutions to problems” mean? Who decides what this means? How is it determined? How often do I have to “successfully seek solutions” in order to meet the Level 3 standard? Is the emphasis on “resourcefulness” or on “successfully seeking?” Since “successfully” modifies the verb “seek,” it would appear that I only have to be successful in *seeking* a solution and not necessarily successful in finding or applying it. Is this what the agency intended? Does this mean I research POMS, contact regional office and discuss with my coworkers? Does this mean I rarely come to the supervisor for help? How will management determine this? Will management keep track of the number of times I ask for assistance or input from a Technical Expert or others? How will management do this since supervisors are rarely at their desks and unable to view all unit employees?
- What does “provides assistance to others” mean? Who decides that and what will be considered in making this decision? Am I supposed to stop and help others every time they come to me with a question? Does this mean being willing to take late interviews every day because I come in late so a front end interviewer can leave before 4 pm? Am I supposed to tell you when and how I help other individuals?
- What does “adapts to changes in the workplace, such as adjustments in work priorities and new technology” mean? Who decides the meaning and what is considered in making the decision? How will you measure this? Does management’s changed priorities become more important than the case I need to work on to pay a claimant?



Outstanding Contribution—Level 5

- What does it take to achieve Level 5?
- What does “voluntarily assisting other employees” mean? Who decides this and what will be considered in making this decision? Does taking work from him/her and just processing it? Does this mean volunteering to take work from a co-worker who is behind? Will I get credit for voluntarily working diaries? Will I get credit for working Medicare Part D verification and re-contact cases beyond my fair share of the workload? How will management know that I am voluntarily assisting other employees? Will I need to tell you? Will you expect the person I am helping to confirm that I am helping?
- Can you define “teamwork?” Does this mean that I pitch in and help? What will be used to determine my promotion of teamwork?
- What does “engages other members in the group’s efforts to achieve goals” mean? Who



makes this decision? How will this be measured? Can you give me some examples? What goals are being referred to? Are these numeric goals for the office or unit? If so, where do they come from and who determined them? What if I believe these goals are unrealistic due to short-staffing, too many appointments, and other workload priorities?

- What does “seeking out” additional work assignments mean? Does this mean, I come to management and ask for work? Does this mean that I volunteer to take additional interviews? How will management keep track of this? Will I be required to turn in a log of extra work? How can I volunteer for extra assignments if management has me scheduled to interview all day long? Will

employees in specialized units be given first crack at additional work assignments or will they be offered to interviewers and all other employees?

- Can you explain what “contributes to the implementation of change through suggestions that facilitate change and/or by eliciting contributions from other team members or components” means? Who makes this decision? How will management know if I made any suggestions? Will you record suggestions I make to you in private conversations? Will you keep track of employee suggestions made during unit and staff meetings? Will action be taken on suggestions and feedback given as to whether or not they are adopted? Who will decide whether suggestions are adopted? Will I be given credit towards meeting this element at level 5 even if my suggestion is not adopted?

Performance Element 3—Demonstrates Job Knowledge

Level 3

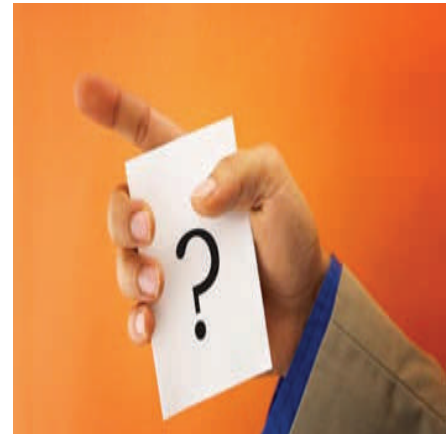
- What does “learns new material and applies it accurately while using appropriate technology and automation tools” mean? Who will decide what this means? Who determines what standards will be used to assess what is appropriate technology or appropriate automation tools? How will you evaluate that I learn new material? Will we be given tests on POMS or Policy Net? If I have a difficult case and talk to my supervisor about new POMS material and management has a different interpretation, will I be rated lower for not understanding the material? When will management come to that conclusion and how will you notify me so I have a fair opportunity to rebut that conclusion? Who will decide if I am correct or not?
- What does “maintains integrity of work processes” mean? Who will decide it? Will cases be reviewed? By whom? Does this mean POMS compliance? Does this also mean I have to follow your instructions, even if that means cutting corners or violating agency policies? What happens if I disagree with you on something that I believe does not meet this performance expectation?
- What does “demonstrates sound analytical reasoning in applying policy, procedures and instructions” mean? Who will decide this? Can you give me some examples of *sound* versus *unsound* analytical reasoning? Will it mean the same for everyone in our office? What option will I have to rebut your decision about how I demonstrated sound reasoning? If IVT

and/or other training are incomplete or inaccurate or if I am absent when the training is presented, how will that be considered in rating my performance?

- What does “provides clear, accurate oral and/or written information and completes accurate work products” mean? Who is going to decide this? Will interview audits and mail reviews be conducted? Does this mean that we have to use DOCS only? Will use of word notices that are written outside of DOCS be acceptable? Will I be held responsible for errors in DOCS notices since those are centrally produced?

Level 5

- What does it take to achieve Level 5?
- What does “demonstrates initiative by voluntarily sharing information, knowledge, skills and best practices” mean? Who decides this? Can you give me some examples of “best practices?” How does this requirement balance with the need of other employees to learn how to research POMS or develop their skills? Can I still achieve Level 5 if I have been told *not* to automatically answer co-workers’ questions because they need to learn how to do independent research? Will I be able to speak about best practices in unit meetings? Will consideration be given to adopting my suggestions?
- If I develop materials for reference, training and mentoring, how do I present this to management for consideration? If the material is rejected, will I still be given credit for my efforts?
- If I am expected to process the most complex work accurately and effectively and develop options and recommendations that result in improved work unit performance, how do I find out what is the most complex work? What does “accurately and effectively mean” and who decides that? If I develop options and recommendations that I feel will result in improved work performance, who will decide if it does and if it will be adopted? What will be looked at to make these decisions? What will be the criteria for determining that my recommendation results in improved work performance? Will I be notified that my recommendations meet or don’t meet this expectation? How can I challenge these decisions?
- What does “contributes to introducing the use of automation tools and fosters their use within the work unit” mean? How will this be evaluated? If I introduce the use of an automation tool and my unit coworkers do not use it, will that keep me from meeting level 5? Does this mean I can achieve Level 5 by *contributing* or am I required to actually *introduce the use* of automation tools? Can you explain how I can demonstrate that I am *introducing the use* of anything? If new tools and technology are things the agency trains employees on, how can I contribute to *introducing the use* of those tools if I have not been selected to do the training?



Performance Element 4—Achieves Business Results

Level 3

- What does “fair share of work” mean? Who will decide that? How will that be determined?
- Will there be an individual determination for each employee?
- What factors will be used to determine “fair share” (grade of employee, work schedule—part-time or fulltime, CWS, leave usage, union official time usage)? Will there be adjustments in meaning throughout the year? Will use of unanticipated leave be considered in determining if I produce my fair share of work?
- What does “completes work assignments timely and/or as scheduled” mean?” How will that be determined and who sets these schedules? Will there be a time frame for appointments? Can you identify specific workloads and what is considered *timely* and what is considered *untimely*?
- If am in the claims unit, does this mean I must take teleclaims and appointments at their scheduled time and cannot be late? What happens when I have an in-office interview that makes me late? What happens if I have not had break or lunch but there is another interview or appointment scheduled? Does this mean that time frames will be established for initiation of all work?
- What happens if I am on leave? Will my work be backed up? What happens if a claim is allowed when I am on leave? Will someone adjudicate the claim or leave it for me when I return? Will this be taken into consideration in determining if I meet this expectation?
- What does “uses a balanced approach to complete work assignments effectively and efficiently using appropriate technology” mean? Who will decide this? What will be considered in making this decision? Will there be allowances for times when the system is down; for unexpected absences of co-workers that can limit the time available to perform balanced work? Does using appropriate technology mean taking claims in MSSICS and reading each question exactly as written? Does it mean the same for EDCS usage? Does it mean taking applications on paper and keying in later when the system is available? Will I be rated lower if I take claims on paper and key in later, while other employees wait until the system is available? Can you give me examples of “balanced approach” and explain the difference between *appropriate* and *inappropriate* technology?

Level 5

- What does it take to achieve Level 5 performance?
What does “makes a significant contribution to achievement of work unit goals by completing extra work assignments” mean? Who will decide this? What are some examples of extra work assignments? In some offices, only a limited number of individuals are given an opportunity to give speeches. If I want to give speeches, will I be allowed to do so?
- What does “maximizes use of available time and resources” mean? Who will decide this? How is “maximizes” defined? Can you give some examples?



How you will feel at this point of the performance discussion!

- What does “identifies barriers to completing work timely and develops reasonable solutions likely to result in improvement” mean? Can you give some examples? What will happen when I identify a barrier and develop a reasonable solution? Will management consider my proposal seriously? For example, if I propose a back-up plan for those on leave, will it be considered? How will I know? If you do not implement my proposal, will you give me credit for my suggestion? What is the difference between a *reasonable* and an *unreasonable* solution? Can you give me some examples?
- What does “develops creative procedures and approaches for using technology” mean? Who will decide what this means and what will be looked at when this decision is made? What happens if my supervisor does not like my idea? Will it be rejected? Do I have the right to question his or her decision? How do you define *creative*? Can you give me an example of a creative solution versus a non-creative one?

Although these questions are quite comprehensive, they are not intended to be all inclusive. You may have your own questions that need to be answered for you to achieve a complete understanding of management’s expectations. Be sure to document all of management’s responses, especially the questions for which no comprehensible answer can be provided. Tell management if you do not understand their answers, document it and share this information with the union.

For additional information, go to www.afgec220.org. If you click on “Library” from the home page, that will open up another page including a header, *Cope With the New Appraisal System*. Click on that for prior alerts and background information.

Special thanks to Cheryl Hainkel for her work on this alert.

Council 220 Ad Hoc Appraisal Committee

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