



Employment: Define Clear Employee Standards and Engage Accountability

by Richard McGee

A significant portion of tribal dollars are used to recruit and retain casino employees. Are casinos doing enough to help those employees understand when they are performing well and when they need to improve? Moreover, if casino employers are providing employee feedback, is it done correctly?

Providing feedback to employees must be an on-going practice which is summarized by the yearly (or more frequent) performance evaluation. If an employer's primary feedback tool is the yearly performance evaluation, the employer is missing a golden opportunity to shape employee performance between formal evaluations. Before the methods of employee feedback are addressed, why should tribal employers be concerned about providing feedback? Short answer: to improve employee performance.

Employee performance can only improve if there is a nudge toward improvement which will either come from the self-motivated employee or the externally motivated employee. Whether the employee is self-motivated, or motivated by the external boss or paycheck, the tribal employer must be responsible for clearly defining success and failure in the workplace. The best practices for clearly defining workplace standards are discussed in greater detail below.

What is the value of enhancing employee performance? The obvious answer is a better performing employee improves the product provided by the tribal casino. A more efficient dealer, a better customer service experience in a restaurant, true engagement from a player's club employee; all generate a better experience for the casino guest and therefore a better chance the guest returns and tells his or her neighbors about the positive experience. The opposite experience, when a casino guest encounters poor customer service or a half-cleaned bathroom, will generate less loyalty and less play.

Employee improvement begins on the employee's first day. Clearly defining employee expectations in writing through employee handbooks, department standard operating procedures (including internal controls) and job descriptions is the first step. Thereafter, effective employers deliver and explore those written expectations through coherent orientation sessions (casino and department).

Employee enhancement continues on the employee's second day. Once the employee has been introduced to the employer's expectations through the employer's documents and orientation, the employee's director, manager and supervisor have an opportunity to educate and reinforce those

expectations. Directors, managers and supervisors are teachers first and the education role served by them is the leading edge of effective management. Even experienced employees need to be educated in the particular protocols used by the employee's new employer; so therefore educating employees on the employer's expectations is of paramount importance. This education can occur in a formal classroom or as an informal monitoring of employee performance. Through the informal give and take between manager and employee, the manager can reinforce excellence through positive reinforcement and nudge the employee in a different direction when correction is needed.

More formal education can significantly reinforce best practices already learned and expand an employee's present skills. That formal education can be created and delivered by external firms, casino training departments, and as importantly, department directors and managers. When department directors and managers assume that training is a function which lies beyond the responsibilities of the Human Resources department, there begins an understanding that training is everyone's responsibility. The understanding that the responsibility of training is shared by the entire management team will likely prevent the haphazard approach of infrequent training that is not focused on the specific needs of specific departments and employees.

In addition to an understanding that directors, managers and supervisors must clearly define expectations and educate employees in understanding those expectations, managers must maintain constant contact with their subordinates. Depending on the job description, constant contact might mean one time each month or several times a week. But the other path, that a yearly performance evaluation is enough meaningful contact with employees, is a bad idea. Managers who deliver an annual performance evaluation, without more frequent contact with employees during the preceding year, are 11 months late in performing the management function.

The best practices of (1) clearly defining expectations; (2) delivering those expectations through orientations; and (3) reinforcing those expectations by teaching and correcting – all serve as an effective foundation for the annual performance evaluation. When that foundation is formed, the annual performance evaluation is a summary of the 11 months of meaningful engagement between the manager and subordinate. The manager, with that preparation, is ready to offer a performance evaluation.

There are at least six reasons performance evaluations are important.

1. Help employees clearly define and understand their responsibilities. The evaluation, along with a job description and other communication regarding responsibility, reinforces a manager's expectations for employees. Busy employee do not re-read their job descriptions, so the performance evaluation can present another opportunity to reinforce the defined standards found in a good job description.

2. Provide criteria by which employees' performance will be evaluated. The evaluation provides the ingredients used to measure employee performance. Therefore, employers can emphasize those things employers value most in employee performance. For example, if customer service is a primary value for the casino, customer service can be emphasized in the evaluation.

3. Suggest ways in which employees' can improve performance and therefore enhance the services provided by the employee and the tribal organization. A conversation regarding the ways to improve performance is part of an effective evaluation. In completing the evaluation, managers must be mindful of defining ways for employees to more effectively perform each of the employee's functions, and once that determination is made, this must be part of the conversation between manager and subordinate.

4. Identify employees with potential for advancement. The evaluation can be an opportunity for managers to contemplate which employees are ready for taking on more work, different department projects and advancement. Except when employees are subject to a collective bargaining agreement, employee job descriptions can be re-written to reflect additional and different responsibilities which best serve the department. When job descriptions include additional responsibilities, a conversation regarding an increase in compensation is not required by the law, but responsible employers strive to match pay with performance.

5. Help managers achieve department goals. The evaluation can serve as a reminder for managers regarding which tasks are getting done effectively and which tasks are not. The department's strategic plan should be front-of-mind for managers, and the plan can only be fulfilled when specific tasks are achieved.

6. Provide a fair basis for awarding compensation based on the merits. The evaluation provides a fair basis for managers to award compensation increases if they are warranted.

Recommendation: Tribal enterprises which are focused on a common goal are more likely to achieve that goal when the goal is clearly expressed and there are protocols designed to hold everyone accountable for meeting that goal. The tools discussed herein will help in defining direction and measuring when employees are hitting the mark; and when they are not, presenting multiple opportunities for a course correction. ♣

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The advertisement features a collage of images. On the left is a large, illuminated bronze statue of a Native American man holding a spear, standing on a rocky outcrop with a fish in the water below. On the right are three smaller images showing the interior of a casino: a gaming floor with slot machines, a bar area with purple lighting, and a pool table with red and white pool cues.