Coaching for Improved Performance

A desired result of any employee’s behavior is effective job performance. An important part of the manager’s job is to define performance in advance and to state desired results. Performance-related behaviors are directly associated with job tasks and need to be accomplished to achieve the job’s objectives. Enhancing performance includes such sections as the following:

- Identifying performance problems
- Integrating, facilitating, and coordinating the work of employees
- Creating a motivational climate

Managers may also see enhanced and increased performance by removing situational constraints, such as rotating shifts or providing assistance in overcoming constraints. Recognition also enhances performance. Careful management of these factors helps ensure that a staff member’s effort or motivation is actively translated into effective job performance.

Performance appraisals are conducted for a number of reasons. The main reason is to give constructive feedback. A good appraisal system ensures that staff knows what they are to do and how well they are doing it. Performance appraisals often serve as the basis on which administrative decisions, such as the size of a salary increase or who gets promoted, are made. Ideally, accurate appraisal information allows the organization to tie rewards to performance. A final reason for doing performance reviews concerns fair employment practice law. Performance appraisals and the decisions based on those appraisals, such as layoffs, are covered by several federal and state laws. In the past two decades, many employees have successfully sued their organization over employment decisions that were based on questionable performance appraisal results.

It is important that performance appraisals accurately reflect the employee’s actual job performance. If performance ratings are inaccurate, an inferior employee may be promoted, and another employee may not receive needed training, or there may not be a tie between performance and rewards, thus lessening employee motivation. Appraising an employee’s performance can be a difficult job. One way to document ongoing performance is to use an item called a critical incident report or note taking. These are reports of employee behaviors that are out of the ordinary, either positive or negative.

Critical incident reports include four items: name of employee, date and time of incident, a brief description of what occurred, and the nurse manager’s comments on what transpired. By keeping a record of these critical incidents, documenting performance once a year becomes a much easier task. Recording
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critical incidents as they occur will also increase the accuracy of the year-end-performance. The best time to write critical incidents is just after the behavior. Because most nurse managers are extremely busy, they sometimes question whether note taking is a good use of their time. In fact, keeping notes is not a time-consuming process. The average critical incident takes less than two minutes to write. Keeping and sharing notes forces a manager to deal with problems when they are small and can be more quickly addressed. Staff should also be introduced to the technique of critical incidents, or note taking. To get the maximum value out of note taking, nurse managers need to keep in mind the following two important facts:

- The primary reason for taking notes is to improve the accuracy of the performance review.
- When something new is introduced, people tend to automatically react negatively to it.

Once staff realizes that the critical incident note taking also applies to positive behaviors, they will become more receptive to the idea. Additionally, the nurse manager should begin the critical incident process for each staff member with a positive note. In contrast, when performance is poor and a critical incident report is negative, the problem may demand immediate attention and remediation. Poor performing staff do not react well to notes being taken. Generally, the poor performing staff either leaves the organization, or when they discover that they no longer can get away with mediocre performance, the performance usually improves. When staff sees a strong link between valued outcomes and meeting performance expectations, they will be motivated to meet those expectations.