

# Staff Evaluations:

By Stephen Dees

Mention the words "staff evaluation" and some employees get paranoid. Others say, "It's about time." But ask the personnel committee/team to put an evaluation program in place and they'll probably change the subject faster than you can say, "Just kidding!"



## Nuisance or Necessity?

**T**ruth be known, many employers — especially churches — find the topic of staff evaluations to be a nuisance. Typical sentiments range from, *We don't have time to worry about those*, to *Staff evaluations are a waste of time* to *Our staff does a great job, so we don't need to evaluate them*.

On the other hand, staff evaluations don't have to be a nuisance; they can be necessary tools to assist church leaders in some critical areas of personnel management, including...

## Communication

A typical church office scenario:

*It's 8 a.m. on a Monday. The phones are ringing faster than they can be answered. Sisters Maybel Johnson and Francis Smith have just arrived at the office and are asking to see the minister of music. They want to discuss the volume level of the music during Sunday's services. The pastor walks through the office and mentions to the receptionist that she did an excellent job typing his sermon outline for Sunday's sermon.*

Sounds like a normal Monday, right?

Wrong.

The receptionist was so busy trying to answer the phones and point Sisters Maybel and Francis in the right direction that she thought the pastor was being sarcastic and *criticizing* her typed version of the sermon notes. And Sisters Maybel and Francis were offended because the pastor didn't say anything to *them* when he passed through the office. The end result: failure to communicate.

This story might seem far-fetched, but it happens every day, hence the necessity of formal staff evaluations. They give supervisors and subordinates the chance to communicate effectively.

In a small church, communication flows rather freely. When the small church grows, however, the task of communication multiplies. This is true not only in the Church, but in the church staff environment as well. The more staff members

are present, the harder they must work to communicate effectively.

It's no secret that communication is a two-way process requiring the attention of both parties involved. Communicating approval and disapproval of an employee's performance requires a distraction-free setting. Staff evaluations enhance communication that might not otherwise take place.

## Clarification

The first step in creating an evaluation instrument is determining which role each position plays; this is often called a "job description." To be effective, staff evaluation instruments must be directly linked to each employee's job description. (After all, it isn't fair to evaluate an employee based on any other criteria than his or her job description.)

Unfortunately, job descriptions aren't always updated. Over time, staff members are added and responsibilities are divided, making it necessary to update job descriptions on an annual basis.

Additionally, staff members often need clarification regarding the expectations placed on them. People tend to try to live up to what's expected of them so long as their instructions are clear. Job descriptions help prevent misunderstandings, create a feeling of trust, and make it possible to quickly and concisely present a great deal of organized, pertinent information about each position.

## Connection

Most employees want to know how they can do a better job, and regular staff evaluations provide this information.

The key is to connect analysis with development. To do this, it's a good idea for the supervisor to list the subordinate's strengths and weaknesses and present it to him or her as part of the evaluation process.

Discussion should be spent on both the strengths and weaknesses; however, connection becomes a reality only when both parties agree on a set of goals to help the subordinate improve upon weaknesses.

Once such an agreement is reached, it's the supervisor's responsibility to provide opportunities for growth. This might involve sending him or her to training seminars, or even bringing outside training to the workplace.

If you really want to connect with your staff during the evaluation process, try this: Ask them to evaluate themselves based on the same responsibilities you'll be using as their supervisor. Have them bring their self-evaluations when you conduct their annual evaluations. Compare the two. Use the issues you differ on as a springboard for discussion, goal setting and growth.

## Compensation

For years, churches have given all staff members — regardless of job performance — the same amount of annual compensation increase. It's usually a percentage increase based on inflation rates and/or the church's current financial condition. While this method might require less time and energy, it also raises numerous issues.

The best method for providing compensation increases is to establish a church staff salary plan and follow it. Even if your church doesn't have a formal salary plan in place, it's still wise to reward good work with good pay.

If you give the same increase to all employees, regardless of performance, consider this: Using the across-the-board-percentage method doesn't encourage mediocre employees to try harder, nor does it persuade top-notch employees to keep up the good work. Organizational development and personal development are both served when reasonably high goals are set.

## Where to Begin

**Initiate.** Decide that now is the time to begin staff evaluations. Be positive about the evaluation program and the benefits it will bring.

**Involve.** Get everyone on board. Normally this includes the pastor, staff supervisors and personnel committee/team. Make sure these individuals fully understand why the evaluation program is being put into action. Familiarize them with the process from beginning to end, detailing every step.

**Itemize.** Create a list of tasks to be accomplished. Some of these include creating the evaluation instrument, training supervisors how to use the instrument, and orienting all employees on the evaluation program and how it will affect them.

**Implement.** Put the evaluation program into place. Decide who will maintain records, how often evaluations will take place, and who will be conducting them. If your church members need to approve the evaluation program, now is the time to get their vote of confidence.

## Tips for Supervisors

1. **Create a friendly evaluation environment.** Choose a neutral location to ease nervousness.
2. **Spend more time listening and less time talking.** Listening is learning. It encourages employees to talk freely and openly.
3. **Follow up with written documentation.** Be sure one copy of the evaluation meeting and results are placed in the employee's file and another copy is given to the employee.

Making the decision to initiate and implement a staff evaluation program isn't easy. Nevertheless, church leaders who make this crucial decision often see their staff's morale and work ethic drastically improve. This, in itself, is reason enough to consider staff evaluations a necessity, not a nuisance.

*[Footnotes have been omitted due to space constraints.]*

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